

What Does God's Word Say About Eternal Security And Falling Away

Calvinism - Arminianism

September 26, 2010

I. Introduction

A. Goal:

1. To encourage us to search the scriptures – not just our favorite portions or those portions which speak to our felt needs or those portions which comfort us or make us feel better, but all of God's word to see what God has to say to us about all of life.
2. To promote a humble, gracious attitude that promotes the unity of the body of Christ toward those who differ from your position on this issue.

B. Last Sunday we talked about Church History in relation to eternal security as it is taught today and falling away from the faith.

1. We affirmed that according to church history, from the time of the disciples to the Reformation (the first 1500 years) the church taught that a sinful, unrepentant Christian could become apostate – that is, such a Christian would be in a fallen away condition. We also affirmed that the Church leaders worked hard to keep any contrary teaching regarding this topic out of the church.
 - a. Origen's quote from around 225 AD supports this point very well: "Certain ones of those [heretics] who hold different opinions misuse certain passages [of scripture]. They essentially destroy free will by introducing [the teaching that we have] ruined natures incapable of salvation (Calvinism), and by introducing [the teaching that] we can be saved in such a way that we cannot be lost (eternal security as it is taught today)."
 - b. And The Apostolic Constitutions, which were compiled around 390, adds its support when it says: "He who sins after his baptism, unless he repents and forsakes his sins, will be condemned to Gehenna."
2. The Reformation brought change to the Western Church and specifically the Protestant side of the Western Church. The Roman Catholic Church continues to hold that a good Catholic can become apostate by committing one or any number of the mortal sins (the grosser sins listed in the scriptures). The Eastern Church – which we know as the Eastern Orthodox Church has maintained the same theology and doctrine as that held by the churches from their beginning.

3. This brings us to our study for today – and today we are going to look at Calvinism and Arminianism and their influence on the teaching concerning eternal security and falling away from the faith.

C. Pray

II. Calvinism

- A. It wasn't until John Calvin (1509-1564) that unconditional eternal security became an accepted teaching in part of the universal church. And it wasn't until two hundred or so years after Calvin that many churches began accepting and teaching eternal security as we hear it taught today.
- B. Few dispute that John Calvin took some or much of his theology from Augustine's writings. But neither Augustine nor Calvin separated salvation from sanctification – as if you could be saved and then go on to live an unholy, ungodly life. In other words, neither Augustine nor Calvin separated salvation from an ongoing, obvious and measured growth in purity of heart and holiness of conduct – from the time of salvation to the end of one's life.
 1. This is an important point because even though the modern day eternal security teaching borrowed its foundational idea from Calvin, they use it in a way Calvin never intended it to be used.
 2. Calvin taught that God is sovereign over all, including who will be saved, when they will be saved, and how they will live after being saved.
 3. Calvin taught that God sovereignly ensures that everyone elected will persevere in living a godly life from the time of salvation to the time of death.
 4. And according to Calvin, no elected, born again Christian can do otherwise than persevere in godly living until death takes him from this world. This teaching is found in Calvin's, **Perseverance of the Saints**. And Calvin concluded that anyone who did not persevere to the end in living a godly life was proving by his lack of perseverance that he was not elected in the first place.
- C. Fortunately, Calvin wrote a number of commentaries on the Old and New Testament – which means we can take Calvin's own words to support the truth of what I just said about his teaching.
 1. In Calvin's commentary on I John, we come to **I John 3:7-10** . . . Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who

practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

2. This portion of scripture addresses the matter of how we live after being saved. In commenting on this scripture, Calvin says: “*John (the apostle) denied that any one belongs to Christ except he who is righteous and shows himself to be such by his works [behavior].... Hence two conclusions are to be drawn, that those in whom sin reigns cannot be reckoned among the members of Christ, and that they can by no means belong to his body [the Church].... All who are born of God lead a righteous and a holy life, because the Spirit of God restrains the lusting of [desire for] sin.... John not only shows how effectively the power of God works once in man [for salvation], but plainly declares that the Spirit continues God’s grace in us to the last, so that inflexible [fixed, unable to be altered] perseverance is added to newness of life. Let us not, then, imagine with the Sophists [i.e., self-improvement teachers] that it is some neutral movement [of free will combined with good motives], which leaves men free either to follow or to reject; but let us know that our own hearts are so ruled by God’s Spirit, that they constantly cleave to righteousness.... John declares that all who do not live righteously are not of God, because all those whom God calls, he regenerates by his Spirit. Hence newness of life is a perpetual evidence of divine adoption.*”
3. The essence of what Calvin is saying here is that salvation and sanctification are a unified whole, and anyone who is elected to salvation will go on to live a sanctified life. Anything other than the inseparable union of salvation and sanctification did not exist in Calvin’s understanding of scripture. Therefore, anyone who thought they were elected but did not live a sanctified life, was not saved.
4. Therefore, this quote from Calvin is important, because even though Calvin was a theological innovator in relation to God sovereignly deciding who and who would not be saved (Calvin’s explanation of election), he held fast to the prior 1500 years of teaching by the church regarding the necessity of living a godly life following salvation in order to be finally and fully saved.

- D. There is one more point to be made here:
1. From Calvin's perspective, man has no free will, and even if he does, it counts for nothing because he has no ability to exercise his free will in any positive movement toward God. Therefore, both salvation and sanctification – or persevering in living a godly life until death – is, according to Calvinism, all God's doing in the life of the Christian.
 2. This is different from the eternal security teaching of our day. The teaching on eternal security today is based on the Arminian model of theology in relation to salvation and sanctification – that is, on man having a free will and the ability to choose to move toward God or away from God. It is the eternal security side of their teaching that draws from Calvinism in holding to the once saved always saved belief based on God sovereignly overriding however a saved person may live following salvation.

III. Arminianism

- A. The person given credit as the father of Arminianism is Jacobus Arminius, who lived from 1560-1690. He was only four years old when Calvin died. It appears Arminius – in following the first fifteen hundred years of teaching by the church – was influenced away from Calvinism. Arminius is the primary influence in the Church today regarding what the scriptures teach concerning free will in relation to salvation, sanctification, and the perseverance of the saints until death.
- B. There is a foundational difference between Calvinism and Arminianism.
1. Calvinism holds that salvation, sanctification and the perseverance of the saints until death are all God's doing. Many Christians today label this teaching as "The Sovereignty of God."
 2. Arminianism holds that salvation, sanctification, and persevering to the end as a Christian are a combination of God's doing and man's doing. This teaching has taken on the label of "The Free Will of Man."
 3. I think it is important to clarify that Arminianism does not discount the sovereign work of God in the world, or in men's affairs, or in the individual Christian. However, Arminianism sees God's action in these areas different from the way Calvinism sees it.
 - a. Calvinism sees God's sovereignty as determining for us – or deciding for us – if we will be saved, how holy we will be after being saved, and that we will faithfully live a holy life to the end of our days.
 - b. Arminianism, on the other hand, sees God's work as vital to fulfilling God's will, but not deterministic. According to Arminianism, God

gives assistance and empowerment in numerous ways to help us carry out what we, of our own free will, choose to do in response to God's revealed will for us and His actions toward us.

4. Regarding salvation, Arminianism teaches that we come to salvation through the combined work of God's wooing and the Holy Spirit's convicting – on the one hand, and our responding by willfully and freely choosing to repent and put our faith in Christ for salvation.
5. Regarding sanctification, Arminianism teaches that upon being born again, Christians, by the gracious empowerment and assistance of God, are able to resist sin, put off the old nature, and put on Christ-likeness.
6. In other words, from salvation to death, Arminianism teaches that Christians have the freedom of will
 - a. to respond positively to God's call of salvation or to reject His salvation;
 - b. to respond positively to God's rule and word by living according to God's will and word, or to return to their old sinful ways.

- C. Arminianism, like Calvinism, places a strong emphasis on sanctification.
1. Arminianism teaches that how we live after being saved is just as important as salvation itself.
 2. According to the teaching of Arminianism, if a person becomes a Christian and then **returns to a life of unrepented sin**, that person will enter into a fallen away condition. If he does not repent before he dies, he will die in his sin and therefore lose his salvation.
 3. Let us take a closer look at the matter of repentance and forgiveness of sin.
 - a. We know from scripture that when a sinning Christian comes to his senses, confesses his sin and returns to walking God's narrow way, he receives God's forgiveness and continues on with God as a full-fledged Christian.
 - b. But what about the Christian who willfully returns to the persistent practice of one or more known sins? Has he lost his salvation according to Arminianism?
 - (1) If he comes to his senses, confesses and repents of his persistent practice of sin before he dies, he gains forgiveness and continues on with God just as any Christian who confesses and receives forgiveness of sin.
 - (2) However, if he does not repent of his willful and persistent practice of sin before he dies, he is considered to have fallen away from the faith and to have died in his sin.

4. What this means – according to Arminianism – is that the security of salvation is conditional in that it is based on the saving grace of God, the work of Christ on the cross, and the believer’s persevering in righteousness to the end of his life. In other words, according to the teaching of Arminianism, we are secure in our salvation as long as we continue to live a godly life following salvation.
 - a. Falling away (apostasy) begins when we deliberately and willfully turn away from God’s will and word and return to a life that is pointed in the direction of knowingly and willingly practicing sin.
 - b. Falling away concludes in eternal damnation when we persist in the practice of known, unrepented sin and die in that unrepentant state.

5. You might be thinking that Arminianism promotes a works based salvation rather than a grace based salvation. After all, if we are saved by grace and no merit of our own, are we not kept by that same, “no merit of our own,” grace?
 - a. The problem here directly relates to our understanding of God’s purpose in saving us. Does God save us solely for the purpose of rescuing us from eternal damnation and bringing us to heaven when we die? Or is God’s purpose larger than that?
 - b. The Arminians conclude that God’s purpose is larger than that, as revealed in the Old Testament in regard to Israel and in the New Testament in regard to the Church.
 - (1) God’s intention for Israel was both present and eternal, relational and practical. Consider:
 - (a) Israel was to be a people for His own possession: **Deuteronomy 7:6** . . . For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
 - (b) Israel was to be a light to the nations: **Isaiah 42:6-7** . . . I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, [7] To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.
 - (2) God’s intention for the Church (NT believers) is also both present and eternal, relational and practical – as stated so clearly in **I Peter 2:9-10** . . . But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may

proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; [10] for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

6. Therefore, to the Arminian, living a sanctified life is not man trying to merit or keep his salvation through works, but rather man fulfilling the intentions of God for salvation – which includes more than taking us to heaven when we die.

IV. Conclusion

- A. For the sake of clarification, let me restate that both Calvinism (Reformed Theology) and Arminianism (Free Will) differ from the current teaching on eternal security.
 1. Calvinism teaches that the believer is eternally secure because the same sovereign God who elected and saved him sovereignly keeps him living a godly life to the end.
 2. Arminianism teaches that the believer responds to the invitation of God for salvation through an act of his will, and he can, with the same will, choose to turn away from God and return to living in known sin. If he dies in his unrepented, ongoing practice of sin, he will die in a lost condition – having lost his salvation. Therefore, the believer is secure in his salvation as long as he continues living according to the truth he has gained from knowing the will and word of God.
- B. Next Sunday, we will look at Eternal Security as it is taught today.