

Whose Doing Is It? God's or Man's

Church History and Differing Theologies - 1

July 4, 2010

I. Preparatory Information

A. **Romans 11:33-36** . . . Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! [34] For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? [35] Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? [36] For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

B. Ultimate Goal Of This Teaching

1. To encourage you to look at the entire Bible – both Old and New Testaments – when searching out what God is like, how God deals with us, and what God says about specific topics or issues.
2. To show you the beauty of God's Word by demonstrating that when taken as a whole rather than selected or favored parts, it brings to light the unity between seemingly contradictory topics and issues even when that unity remains partly shrouded in mystery.

C. Three Layers of Theology in Our Day

1. The **Foundational Layer**: The Basic Theology or Tenets of the Faith which all Christians hold to – either knowingly or unknowingly. These are sufficiently expressed by the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.
2. The **Primary Layer** – built on top of the **Foundational Layer**:
 - a. Calvinism, or Reformed Theology
 - b. Arminianism, or The Theology of Free Will
 - c. In the universal church today, these are seen as competing theologies. Indeed, you cannot hold both at the same time. In other words, if you hold to Calvinism, it would be natural for you to see Arminianism as a wrong, or at the very least, a competing understanding of God, the scriptures and God's dealings with us. The same is true for those who hold to Arminianism.
3. The **Secondary Layer** – built on top of the **Foundational Layer** and one **Primary Theology** or on selected parts of both of the **Primary Theologies**.
 - a. Dispensationalism

- b. Covenant Theology
 - c. Eternal Security as it is taught today – which is a mixture of Calvin’s eternal security and Arminias’ free will.
 - d. These three **Secondary Layers** of theology are often mixed together and layered on top of either Calvinism or Arminianism. For example:
 - (1) You can find Calvinists who are Dispensationalists and who hold a fairly strong position on God’s covenants with man throughout history.
 - (2) And there are many Arminians who believe in Eternal Security as it is taught today while holding a dispensational view of history, which means they view God’s covenants – at least with Israel – as important parts of the way God has interacted with His people and mankind in general.
4. Mixed in among these primary and secondary theological positions we find a number of other issues defining and therefore separating churches and Christians into denominations. For example (just a few) there is the issue of baptism (adult believers only or anyone who is in the church), communion (closed or open to all who are in attendance), sanctification (all God’s doing, second work of grace, our responsibility – though we need God’s empowerment to succeed), the Holy Spirit (how and when He is received, sign gifts – and especially speaking in tongues – as a verifying manifestation of receiving the Holy Spirit), and musical instruments / no musical instruments in the church.
- D. Why do we separate over these differing primary and secondary theological belief systems?
- 1. I suppose because we are more inclined to uniformity rather than unity, or pride instead of humility, or so called peace among brothers rather than the testing and growth that comes from living in a community where folks differ from us or where some think they are right – in a condescending way or where we are not listened to with the same respect given to a few others – and especially those others who hold a different view from us.
 - 2. However, it is my opinion that we ought to respect and maintain fellowship with any God-fearing Christian regardless of his primary or secondary theological positions.

- a. In other words, it is my opinion that it is unnecessary, as well as harmful to the unity of the Body of Christ, to separate over primary or secondary theological views.
- b. However, separating over the Foundational Theological views has been an important practice of the Church since its beginning – as shown in John’s second epistle: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. [8] Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. [9] Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. [10] If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; [11] for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds (II John 1:7-11).

II. The Foundational Theology of the Church – or Basic Theology or Tenets of the Faith that All Christians’ Hold – as expressed by the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.

- A. When the Apostles' Creed was drawn up (1st or 2nd century), the chief enemy was Gnosticism, which denied that Jesus was truly Man. Therefore, the emphases of the Apostles' Creed is on affirming Jesus as fully God and fully man at one and the same time.
 1. **The Apostles Creed** – I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic (universal) church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.
- B. When the Nicene Creed was drawn up (325 AD), the chief enemy was Arianism, which denied that Jesus was fully God. Arius was an elder in Alexandria in Egypt, in the early 300's. He taught that God, in the beginning, created the Son, and that Jesus, as a created being joined the Father in creating the world. The result of this was to make Jesus a

created being, and hence not God in any meaningful sense. This view has been resurrected and proclaimed by the Jehovah Witnesses in our day.

1. **The Nicene Creed** – I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Catholic (universal) and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

III. The Two Primary Theological Views Held in the Protestant Church Today

A. Calvinism / **Reformed Theology** (John Calvin, 1509 – 1564)

1. Nullified Free Will, and instead emphasized the Sovereignty of God over mankind – especially in relation to salvation and sanctification.
2. Basic Calvinism – TULIP
 - a. **T** = Total Depravity – all people, by nature of being Adam’s descendants (the Fall), are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because sin has tainted every part of our being.
 - b. **U** = Unconditional Election – unconditional election teaches that God's choice from eternity of those whom He will bring to himself is not based on anything good in us (foreseen virtue, merit, or faith). Salvation is unconditionally grounded in God's sovereign choice and mercy alone.
 - c. **L** = Limited Atonement – Jesus death on our behalf was only for those who God elects / predestines to salvation. In other words, Christ died for some sinners but not for all sinners.

- d. **I** = Irresistible Grace – those whom God elected will be saved – in God’s good timing – because they cannot resist God’s purposes, God’s election, and God’s saving grace.
 - e. **P** = Perseverance of the Saints – because God is sovereign, His will cannot be frustrated or resisted by humans or anything else. Therefore, those whom God has elected will continue in the faith – or will continue living a sanctified life – until the end. Those who appear to fall away were either never elected to begin with or they will eventually repent and return.
3. Calvinism teaches salvation and sanctification as **all God’s doing**

IV. Conclusion