

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

Church History and Differing Theologies

August 1, 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. Review:
 - 1. Ultimate Goal Of This Teaching
 - a. 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. Three Layers of Theology in Our Day
 - a. 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.
 - b. The **Primary Layer** – built on top of the **Foundational Layer**:
 - (1) Calvinism, or Reformed Theology
 - (2) Arminianism, or The Theology of Free Will
 - c. The **Secondary Layer** – built on top of the **Foundational Layer** and one **Primary Theology** or on selected parts of both of the **Primary Theologies**.
 - (1) Dispensationalism
 - (2) Covenant Theology
 - (3) Eternal Security as it is taught today.
- C. We have already looked at the Foundational Theology of the Church, the two Primary Theologies of our day, and Dispensationalism. Today, we will look at Covenant Theology and Eternal Security as it is taught today.

II. Three Secondary Theologies Prominent in the Protestant Church Today

A. Covenant Theology

1. It is believed by most church historians that Covenant Theology was not systematized (*laid out as a well defined, complete system*) until right after the Reformation – yet this view of God and scripture has roots going back to the early church, and its essence or core beliefs are found in Calvinism and Dispensationalism.
2. Covenant Theology builds its view of God and the scriptures primarily through the lense of the covenants God has made with mankind from Adam and Eve through the Church Age. The common list of significant covenants between God and man is as follows:
 - a. Covenant with Adam (and Eve)
 - b. Covenant with Noah following the flood (rainbow)
 - c. Covenant with Abraham and his descendants (faith)
 - d. Covenant with Israel at Sinai (Law – including the blessings and the curses for fulfilling or breaking the Law)
 - e. Covenant with David (someone from his lineage would sit on the throne for ever – this was fulfilled in Jesus)
 - f. New Covenant (saved by grace, filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered to live a godly life, eternal life with God)
3. For most Covenantalists, the Bible is broken down into two primary covenants, (1) the covenant of works (Law) or what we call the Old Testament, and (2) the covenant of grace (Christ) – or what we call the New Testament.
 - a. However, the Abrahamic Covenant is a significant covenant in relation to the NT Covenant of Grace.
 - b. The reason for this is that the Abrahamic Covenant is a covenant which God made with a man of faith along with all subsequent people who live by faith in God as Abraham did.
4. In our own country, the Puritans gave a big boost to covenant theology because of the influence they had from the earliest days of settling this land.
5. Covenant Theology is **more God's doing and less man's doing**. Why?
 - a. Because it is God who sets up the covenant: (1) the agreement, (2) the blessings for keeping covenant, and (3) the consequences for breaking covenant.
 - b. In addition, it is God who perfectly keeps His side of the covenant with us. In fact, throughout the Bible, the language used to describe God's side or part is consistently strong language depicting

eternal faithfulness to His side of the Covenant and our complete security in His faithfulness to fulfill His word.

- c. If any covenant between God and man is broken, it has always been broken due to man's doing. To this extent, Covenant Theology retains free will.
- B. Eternal Security – A Mixture of Arminianism and Calvinism
1. There is no historical evidence as to who began this view of God, His word, and salvation. And we do not know exactly when this teaching began to be held as an accepted theology in the Church. To the best of my knowledge, this view was introduced to the Church between 200- 250 years ago. It has grown in influence over the years to the point that it is an accepted teaching by many Christians today.
 2. This teaching on Eternal Security brings together an underlying commitment to Arminianism's Free Will with a unique interpretation and application of Calvin's Perseverance of the Saints.
 - a. Under this teaching, we come to salvation and live the Christian life through the Arminian model of God's assistance and man's choices – or what we call free will.
 - (1) There is no question in this teaching about being saved by God's grace alone, and living the Christian life by God's empowerment.
 - (2) But neither is there any question as to the continued free exercise of our will as we respond to God and His doing in regard to salvation and sanctification. This is the Arminian part of this teaching.
 - b. The Calvinism side of the teaching on eternal security comes from Calvin's general principle concerning God's Sovereign rule over our lives (**all God's doing**) and Calvin's specific teaching concerning the Perseverance of the Saints (**once saved always saved because an elected believer cannot fall away from the faith**).
 - c. In other words:
 - (1) We are saved by a combination of God's grace and an act of our will in response to God's grace.
 - (2) We are preserved or protected from losing our salvation by the sovereign work of God to the point that our free will is no longer a factor in relation to the possibility of falling away and losing our salvation. Or to put it a bit differently, losing our salvation is taken out of our hands and put in the hands of our Sovereign

God who keeps us secure regardless of our choices and behavior following our coming to faith in Christ and being born again.

3. Among those who hold to this teaching on eternal security, there are two primary groups:
 - a. There is the group that teaches that once you are saved you are always saved – regardless of how you live after being saved. This teaching claims two primary supports:
 - (1) First, there are specific scriptures that teach we are eternally secure once we are saved, and those scriptures contain certain words that cannot mean what they usually mean if we can fall away or lose our salvation. For example, the words “eternal life” cannot mean “eternal life” if we can lose our salvation.
 - (2) Second, if how we behave after being saved determines if we remain saved, then that kind of salvation is works based salvation – and we know there is no such thing as works based salvation because we are saved by grace alone.
 - b. There is a second group within the Eternal Security camp that teaches once saved always saved. However, if after supposedly being saved, you fall into living an ungodly life – and die without repenting – then it is proof you were never saved to begin with. This approach solves the problem of possibly falling away or losing your salvation because any one who returns to a life of sin after seemingly being born again proves they were never saved to begin with. This teaching comes directly from Calvin’s Perseverance of the Saints.
4. Eternal security as it is taught today makes **salvation a combined act of God’s doing and our doing** while making **the security of our salvation all God’s doing**.

III. Important Foundational Truths and Presuppositions For Moving Ahead In This Study

- A. We do not have the answer to every question raised about God. We do not have an explanation of every scripture verse or group of verses. And it is my opinion that we do not have to have an answer or an explanation for everything. God and His word has some mysteries that we simply cannot solve in this life – and those mysteries do not have to limit our faith and our obedience to whatever God says and to what we do know.
- B. The Word of God should determine our theology rather than our theology determining what God’s word says. One common sign that our theology has the upper hand in influencing our view of God and His word is

knowing more about our theological position and the selected scriptures used to support our position than about all the scriptures related to the position – be they for or against or directly or indirectly related.

- C. Where there is division among believers concerning a particular theological position, we should examine the scriptures to see if the Bible speaks to both sides of the theological debate. If the Bible speaks to both sides, we should take both sides as God's Word and therefore worthy of equal consideration.
- D. Where the scripture speaks to an issue in only one place (single verse, or group of verses), that place becomes the basis for understanding what the Bible teaches about that issue. Where the scripture speaks to an issue in many and varied places, those places as a combined whole become the basis for understanding what the Bibles teaches about that issue.
- E. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. Neither the OT nor the NT are to be taken as a closed text – separate and exclusive from the other. They are a unified whole where each is made clearer or expanded by the other. Therefore, we ought to use both Testaments to better understand both Testaments.
 - 1. Much of what we take from the OT to further our understanding of the NT is based on prophecy, types, a careful use of allegory (using one thing to represent another), a literal understanding, and quotes or references from the OT found in the NT.
 - 2. The Apostles and earliest Christians only had the OT for a Bible. They had the teachings of Christ in verbal form, and they had the teachings of the Apostles, but they had no NT, for it was being written during those early days of the Church. Yet look at their life and power. My point here is that the OT holds importance for us today and ought to be read that way.
- F. Appealing to the Greek language in order to better define a word or learn how it is to be used in a specific passage is scholarly, reasonable and often helpful. Deciding whose presentation of what tense a particular Greek word is, or how it is to be defined in a specific passage is difficult because there are those who use the Greek to support their theology rather than to discover what a particular passage says regardless of their theology. Therefore, building or basing our theology on the use of Greek definitions and the historical use of Greek words ought to be done with great care
- G. Church history should not decide what the Bible teaches, but it should give us cause to consider what we are reading into or teaching from the Bible if we are holding to or believing in a teaching that is new or which the church dismissed or ignored or fought against from the beginning.

- H. There is wisdom in placing ourselves under the teaching and/or authority of an older, wiser Christian of godly character and who is well acquainted with the scriptures. In the pursuit of such a person, godly character counts for more than being well acquainted with the scriptures. Why? Because being well acquainted with the scriptures without godly character is of very little help when it comes to discovering and understanding God's character, attributes, ways, and the truth of His word.
- I. In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.
(Augustine)

IV. Conclusion