

1. **Introduction**: There are many active Christian denominations in the United States. They hold to different theologies.
  - If we restrict our view to Protestant Evangelical Churches, there are two primary categories of theology. One category is referred to as “Arminian Theology,” the other referred to as “Reformed Theology or Calvinism.”
  - In this study, we will look at some differences between these two and consider some of the history relating to how the differences came about.
  - The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) adheres to reformed theology.
2. **A Tentative List of Arminian and Calvinist Denominations, and Some that are Mixed**
  - **1. Primarily Arminian Doctrine**: Holiness, Nazarene, Free Methodist, Methodist, Wesleyan, Church of Christ, Free Will Baptists, Some Bible Churches.
  - **2. Primarily Calvinist doctrine**: Conservative Presbyterian denominations (PCA, OPC, CRC, RCA, ARP, Cumberland PC, EPC), Reformed Baptists, Some Bible Churches.
  - **3. Mixture of the 2 Categories**: Doctrine includes some elements of both Arminianism and Calvinism plus some that is neither. Many Baptist Churches, Evangelical Free Church of America, Some Bible Churches.
3. **Two books**: In 2004, Inter-Varsity Press published two books with the intent of encouraging the two sides of the Arminian/Calvinist controversy to seek to understand each other’s positions. The two books are:
  - (1.) **Why I Am Not A Calvinist** written by two Arminian scholars.
  - (2.) **Why I Am Not An Arminian** written by two Calvinist scholars.
  - In the book **Why I Am Not A Calvinist** one thing the authors did was to give a list of issues divided into two categories – classical issues and modern points of difference.
4. **Classical Issues on Which Arminian and Reformed Theology Differ**
  - Does God determine solely according to His own unilaterally established will, exactly who will be saved and who lost?
  - Did Jesus’ atonement make provision to save only the elect, or has actual provision been made for the salvation of all of mankind?
  - Are humans so fallen that they must be saved exclusively through the saving approaches of God’s grace?
  - Is it possible for a human to resist (successfully) the saving approaches of God’s grace?
  - Does God enable all persons to respond positively to the available light?
  - Can any who were once truly redeemed through faith in Christ fail to receive salvation?
5. **Modern Issues on Which Arminian and Reformed Theology Differ**
  - Are women eligible for ordination in pastoral and teaching ministries without restriction?
  - What is to be the nature of a wife’s submission to her husband?
  - What is the proper relationship between church and state?

- Is a specifically Christian legislative agenda viable in a (largely secular) modern society?
- What is the moral status of state-sponsored violence, whether in the form of declared war, restricted peace-keeping actions, or capital punishment?
- What should be the relationship between modern science and the Genesis creation accounts & prevailing theories of the big bang and biological evolution?
- What is the fate of those who never hear the gospel or hear only a distorted version?
- What is the true theology of the sacraments, especially baptism – its proper mode (immersion only?), its proper subjects (infants or believers?) and the sense in which it imparts grace?
- How should divorce and remarriage be handled with respect to the church’s blessing and to (added) restrictions imposed on ministers?  
What is the scope and function of spiritual gifts in this present “dispensation” with special reference to speaking in tongues, words of wisdom, and healing?
- To what degree should corrective discipline be administered by a congregation to its spiritually wayward members?
- What is the proper normative spiritual profile of Christian life, regarding the possibility of real moral transformation, victory over sin, and true Christlikeness?
- Is a clergy-laity distinction viable in today’s church and, if so, what is the proper role of ordination in creating and maintaining this distinction?
- What is God’s end-time program (signs, rapture, tribulation, millennium, multiple judgments and final state)?
- What is the role of Satan and the demonic as personal, intentional, and specific forces of evil in the experience of believers?
- What is the proper nature and scope of exorcism and spiritual warfare as valued practices within the church?
- What is the nature of eternal punishment for the wicked?

## 6. A Simplified History of Arminianism and Calvinism

- When leaders of the Protestant Reformation were unsuccessful in getting the Roman Catholic Church to correct errors in their teaching and practice, several break-away new denominations were formed.
- Martin Luther (1483-1546) born in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) born in Switzerland, and John Calvin (1509-1564) born in France, were prominent in the early Reformation. Each of them started a new denomination.
- There was considerable agreement between the three leaders, but there were also significant differences. Other denominations eventually were formed.
- We will follow John Calvin and Jacob Arminius (originally a Calvinist but developed concerns about Calvin’s interpretation of some salvation principles).
- Eventually, followers of Arminius’ theology became known as Armenians.

- In the early days of settlement of what became the United States, most Christians were Calvinists. Today in the US, most Christians are Arminian.
- What happened? What are the differences and commonalities between Arminian denominations and Reformed denominations?
- Augustine's theological concepts related to the salvation issue were:
  - (1.) Sin so debilitates the sinner that if anyone is to be saved, God must do it.
  - (2.) Not all are saved. Therefore, God intends for only some to be saved.
- In the 1500's, Martin Luther and John Calvin both largely followed the traditional theology of Augustine. In the 1600's, Arminius' began to oppose some elements of Augustine's theology leading to the controversy with Calvinists.
- When the controversy arose, Calvinists continued to follow Augustine.
- Arminian theology is a reaction to Augustine/Calvinist theology. It is interesting that most leaders on both sides were Calvinists trained at Calvin's Geneva Academy.
- Calvin's friend Theodore Beza replaced Calvin as Academy head and principal teacher when Calvin died in 1564.
- Jacob Arminius was one of the men trained by Beza. Arminius left Geneva Academy in 1587 to go to Amsterdam where he became a Pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church which was the official state church of Holland.
- Arminius believed portions of Calvin's theology dealing with election, effectual calling, and perseverance were wrong.
- Arminius began to develop and preach an opposing view. He encountered resistance both from other Dutch Reformed pastors and from state church officials.
- In about 1607, Arminius was charged with deviating from Confessional Standards of the Reformed Church.
- He responded in 1608 with a written defense that included criticism of Calvinist salvation doctrine. Arminius died in 1609, but his followers continued to pursue the arguments.
- Pastors in the Dutch Reformed Church, who preached Arminius' views, were soon in danger of being dismissed for deviating from Confessional Standards.
- Trying to gain protection, the Pastors met in 1610, producing a written complaint to government officials that spelled out what they believed to be wrong with Calvinist salvation doctrine.
- They provided brief arguments supporting their position. The document they produced is referred to as "The Remonstrance."
- In summary it argued for 5 opposition positions: (1.) Conditional Election, (2.) Universal Atonement, (3.) Total Depravity Mitigated by Prevenient Grace, (4.) Resistible Grace, and (5.) Conditional Perseverance.
- In 1611, a conference of both sides was held in Hague, but nothing came of it.
- In 1618-19, a Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church was held.

- By the time the Synod met, the 5-article presentation of the Remonstrance had become the standard form for addressing the contested doctrines.
  - The Synod ruled against the Arminians. The written report responded to each of the five-points of Remonstrance. The report eventually became the Five Points of Calvinism.
  - In view of their joint Calvinist background, it is not surprising that there is a substantial overlap between Arminian and Calvinist theology.
  - Both believe the God of the Bible exists, is sovereign, and is creator of the universe and all that is in it. Both believe the Bible is God’s inerrant Word and that it is the only sure guide for faith and practice.
  - Both believe in a literal fall resulting in a debilitating sin nature for humans.
  - Both believe in the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - Although there are many commonalities, there are also very significant differences. Some differences are difficult to detect because Arminians and Calvinists often use familiar theological words to signify different things.
  - They do so without bothering to explain what the words are intended to signify. For example, “Gods’ sovereignty” means something quite different to an Arminian than it does to a Calvinist.
  - Using the same words to mean different things complicates attempts to understand differences in theology.
  - A sentence written by an Arminian may seem correct to a Calvinist, but if intended meaning of the words is specified, the Calvinist may not agree at all, or vice versa.
  - Arminians and Calvinists hold many presuppositions in common. But each has at least **one non-negotiable presupposition not held by the other.**
  - To me, these non-negotiable presuppositions are the key to differences between Arminians and Calvinists.
7. **Armenian Non-negotiable Presupposition:** Arminians, but not Calvinists, hold “**human libertarian free will**” as a non-negotiable presupposition.
- The presumption of “libertarian free will” as “an absolute” means every other presupposition and every interpretation of Scripture must be consistent with “libertarian free will.”
  - That means, for example, that the sovereignty of God must be interpreted in a manner consistent with preserving human libertarian free will.
  - Thus, God cannot cause regeneration by His will alone. The human will must first consent and then God can regenerate.
  - Belief precedes regeneration. If a person’s will does not consent, that person cannot be saved. God’s election must depend on His foreknowledge of who will consent to believe and be saved.

8. **Calvinist Non-negotiable Presupposition:** Calvinists, but not Arminians, hold “God’s absolute sovereignty” as a non-negotiable presupposition.
- That means every other presupposition and all interpretations of Scripture must be consistent with God’s absolute sovereignty.
  - For example, this means that human free will must be interpreted in a manner consistent with God’s absolute sovereignty. Libertarian free will is not possible.
  - Election to salvation must be a sovereign act of God with no human involvement.
  - People are passive under God’s act of regeneration. Regeneration, in which God makes the spiritually dead become spiritually alive, enables the human will to consent to belief, to have faith. It is God’s gift.
9. **Interpretation of Scripture:** Both Arminians and Calvinists agree Scripture interprets Scripture, and clear passages must be used to interpret the less-clear passages. The problem is that they disagree on which passages are clear and which are not clear.
- For an Arminian, for a passage to be labeled a clear passage, it must be consistent with libertarian free will.
  - For Calvinists, for a passage to be labeled a clear passage, it must be consistent with the absolute sovereignty of God.
  - Given these constraints, is it surprising that Arminian lists of clear passages will contain passages that Calvinist list as unclear, and vice versa.