

JAMES ARMINIUS: THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER AND THE POSSIBILITY OF APOSTASY

Reformed or Classical Arminians have held that the believers security is conditional upon a persevering faith, and that it is possible for a believer to *become an unbeliever* (commit apostasy) and fall away from a saving relationship with Christ. But what was the position of the person most associated with Arminianism—James Arminius?

After reading conflicting opinions about his position, I decided it was time to investigate the issue for myself. I first read everything that pertains to *perseverance, faith, and falling away* in the *Works of Arminius*.¹ I then consulted the pertinent chapters on this issue in *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, from an expert on Arminius, Carl Bangs. Lastly, I read the recent scholarly work done by Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609*.²

What did I discover in my investigation? It would be best to allow Arminius to explain his position in his “Declaration of the Sentiments.”³

¹ I have the London Edition of the three volume hardcover: *The Works of James Arminius*, translated by James Nichols and William Nichols, with an Introduction by Carl Bangs (Baker Book House, 1986). James Nichols translated volumes one and two, and William Nichols the third.

² This book was published by Brill, 2007. I obtained Stanglin’s book through inter-library loan only after I had essentially completed this article. Therefore, most of his comments and conclusions I have chosen to insert in the footnotes. My conclusions were in line with his on the issue of how Arminius understood the security of the believer and the possibility of apostasy.

³ The full title reads: “A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius on Predestination, Divine Providence, the Freedom of the Will, the Grace of God, the Divinity of the Son of God, and the Justification of Man before God.”

Declaration of the Sentiments and the Perseverance of the Saints

This “Declaration” was delivered before the States of Holland, on October 30th, 1608, about a year before his death. In his Introduction to the *Works of Arminius*, Carl Bangs says that the “Declaration” is “Arminius’s concise, mature, cautious but forthright, personal and theological testimony.”⁴ On the matter of the Perseverance of the Saints

Arminius writes:

That those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith, and have thus been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, possess *sufficient powers* [or strength] to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies — yet not without the assistance of the grace of the same Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ also by his Spirit assists them in all their temptations, and affords them the ready aid of his hand; and, provided they stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, Christ preserves them from falling. So that it is not possible for them, by any of the cunning craftiness or power of Satan, to be either seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ. But I think it is useful and will be quite necessary in our first convention, [or Synod] to institute a diligent inquiry from the Scriptures, whether it is not possible for some individuals through negligence to desert the commencement of their existence in Christ, to cleave again to the present evil world, to decline from the sound doctrine which was once delivered to them, to lose a good conscience, and to cause Divine grace to be ineffectual. Though I here openly and ingenuously affirm, I never taught that a *true believer can, either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish*; yet I will not conceal, that there are passages of scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see, are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine [of unconditional perseverance] which are worthy of much consideration.⁵

⁴ *The Works of Arminius*, “Introduction,” xvi. Keith Stanglin says this is “perhaps the most important document for understanding Arminius. However, . . . [it] was in no way intended to be the statement of Arminius’s whole theology” (*Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 11-12).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:219-220. William Nichols notes: “Arminius spoke nearly the same modest words when interrogated on this subject in the last Conference which he had with Gomarus, before the states of Holland, on the 12th of Aug. 1609, only two months prior to his decease” (*Works of Arminius*, 1:665).

On another occasion Arminius diligently examined certain articles that had caused controversy among those of the reformed religion. Article 21 was “On the Perseverance of the Saints”:

1. **QUERIES.** — Is it possible for true believers to fall away totally and finally:
2. Do some of them, in reality, totally and finally fall from the faith?

Arminius held that true believers have sufficient power or strength to be victorious over sin, Satan, the flesh, and the world. Yet this strength to be victorious does not come without the gracious assistance of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Christ preserves believers from falling away, but this preservation does not take place *unconditionally*, a *condition* is attached—“provided that they stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves.”

I would argue that these conditions would all fall under the umbrella of *persevering in faith* in Arminius’s theology, for elsewhere he writes that God “wills that they, who believe and persevere in faith, shall be saved, but that those, who are unbelieving and impenitent, shall remain under condemnation.”⁶ Arminius goes on to reiterate that God does not will “that any man shall be saved in a sense, such that salvation will, certainly and infallibly, come to him, unless he is considered as a believer, and as persevering in faith even to the end.”⁷ It is *believers* who are standing prepared for the battle, imploring

3. The opinion which denies “that true believers and regenerate persons are either capable of falling away or actually do fall away from the faith totally and finally,” was never, from the very times of the apostles down to the present day, accounted by the church as a catholic doctrine. Neither has that which affirms the contrary ever been reckoned as a heretical opinion; nay, that which affirms it possible for believers to fall away from the faith, has always had more supporters in the church of Christ, than that which denies its possibility of its actually occurring. (Ibid., 2:472-473)

⁶ Ibid., 3:412. In another place Arminius expresses the same idea: “God resolves to receive into favor those who repent and believe, and to save in Christ, on account of Christ, and through Christ, those who persevere [in faith], but to leave under sin and wrath those who are impenitent and unbelievers, and to condemn them as aliens from Christ” (Ibid., 2:465, brackets are mine). He goes on to explain that God’s determination to save some people and to condemn others “. . . rests or depends on the prescience and foresight of God, by which he foreknew from all eternity what men would, through such administration, believe by the aid of preventing or preceding grace, and would persevere [in faith] by the aid of subsequent or following grace, and who would not believe and persevere” (Ibid., 2:466, brackets are mine). In short, God “wills eternal life only to the believing and penitent” (Ibid., 3:443).

⁷ Ibid., 3:413.

his help, and not wanting to themselves, or in other words, persevering in faith, who cannot be seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ by the power of Satan.

So far, nothing in Arminius' statements contradicts what John Wesley (1703-1791) and other Reformed Arminians have taught. Nevertheless, Arminius openly states that he never taught that a believer can actually fall away from the faith and perish, something that the Remonstrants (Arminian party) openly taught in their "Opinions of the Remonstrants" in 1618, and which Wesley openly asserted in his "Serious Thoughts on the Perseverance of the Saints" in 1751.

Arminius was not ignorant of the Scriptural passages which seem to be teaching the possibility of apostasy, and thought that it would be quite necessary for him and others to diligently examine them further. Unfortunately, Arminius passed away on October 19, 1609 before getting a chance to do so.

The Remonstrants and the Perseverance of the Saints

After the death of Arminius the leadership of the Remonstrants followed their leader's statements on the *Perseverance of the Saints*, and maintained his uncertainty as to whether believers are capable of committing apostasy. This is evidenced in the fifth article drafted by its leaders in 1610:

That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by not craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hand, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: 'Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings

of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with full persuasion of our minds.⁸

Sometime between 1610, and the official proceeding of the Synod of Dort (1618), the Remonstrants became fully persuaded in their minds that the Scriptures taught that a genuine believer was capable of falling away from faith and perishing. They formalized their view in “The Opinion of the Remonstrants.” Its fifth article reads:

1. The perseverance of believers in the faith is not an effect of the absolute decree by which God is said to have chosen singular persons defined by no condition of obedience.
2. God provides true believers with as much grace and supernatural powers as He judges, according to His infinite wisdom, to be sufficient for persevering and for overcoming the temptations of the devil, the flesh, and the world; it is never charged to God’s account that they do not persevere.
3. True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently.
4. True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish.
5. Nevertheless we do not believe that true believers, though they may sometimes fall into grave sins which are vexing to their consciences, immediately fall out of every hope of repentance; but we acknowledge that it can happen that God, according to the multitude of His mercies, may recall them through His grace to repentance; in fact, we believe that this happens not infrequently, although we cannot be persuaded that this will certainly and indubitably happen.
6. The following dogmas, therefore, which by public writings are being scattered among the people, we reject with our whole mind and heart as harmful to piety and good morals: namely, 1) True believers are not able to sin deliberately, but only out of ignorance and weakness. 2) True believers through no sins can fall out of the grace of God. 3) A thousand sins, even all the sins of the whole world, are not able to render election invalid. 4) To believers and to the elect no sins, however great and grave they can be, are imputed; but all present and future sins have already been remitted. 5) True believers, having fallen into destructive heresies, into grave and most atrocious sins, like adultery and homicide, on account of which the church, after the justification of Christ, is compelled to testify that it is not able to tolerate them in its

⁸ *The Creeds of Christendom Volume III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, “The Articles of the Remonstrants,” ed. by Philip Schaff, 3:548-549. Notice once again that the believer’s security is *conditional*—Christ keeps believers from falling “if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive” (emphasis added).

external communion and that they will have no part in the kingdom of Christ unless they are converted, nevertheless are not able to fall from faith totally and finally.

7. A true believer, as for the present time he can be certain about his faith and the integrity of his conscience, and thus also concerning his salvation and the saving benevolence of God toward him, for that time can be and ought to be certain; and on this point we reject the pontifical opinion.
8. A true believer can and ought indeed to be certain for the future that he is able, by diligent watchfulness, through prayers, and through other holy exercises, to persevere in true faith, and he ought also to be certain that divine grace for persevering will never be lacking; but we do not see how he can be certain that he will never afterwards be remiss in his duty but that he will persevere in faith and in those works of piety and love which are fitting for a believer in this school of Christian warfare; neither do we deem it necessary that concerning this thing a believer should be certain.⁹

According to the Arminian party, a true believer can fall from true faith into shameful and atrocious deeds, persevere in sin until death, and wind up perishing eternally. Far from being a teaching that some would say arose later out of Wesley and Wesleyan Arminianism, this is what Reformed Arminianism has taught both past and present. One either perseveres in faith characterized by holiness, or perseveres in unbelief characterized by sin. One path leads to life everlasting, one leads to death everlasting.

Arminius, Perkins, and Eternal Security

In 1598, Calvinist William Perkins had his book advocating unconditional predestination published in Cambridge, and again in 1599 in Basel. Carl Bangs says,

Arminius bought the book eagerly, for he was an admirer of Perkins, but he read it with dismay. He took pen in hand to write to Perkins: "I thought I perceived some passages of yours which deserved examination by the rule of truth. Wherefore I deemed that it would not be amiss if I should institute a calm conference with you respecting that little book of yours." He then proceeded to volunteer his comments on the pamphlet—over two hundred pages in the English translations. Before he could finish them and send them to

⁹ See Peter Y. DeJong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619*, Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968, pages 220ff. Predictably, the Arminian party affirms *conditional* security—true believer's, by God's gracious assistance, can persevere in true faith through *diligent watchfulness, prayers, and other holy exercises*.

Perkins for a reply, Perkins died, in 1602. The manuscript lay dormant until after Arminius' death. It was published in 1612 in Leiden by Godefridus Basson.¹⁰

Bangs goes on to add,

The *Examination of Perkins' Pamphlet* is perhaps the most difficult of Arminius' writings. It follows the course of Perkins' theses, which in turn had been an attack on an earlier work (of Baro?). (It is significant that the position which Perkins attacks is always defended by Arminius. . . .) In the midst of the complexity and disorder of this incoherent document, however, are the most complete ingredients of Arminius' doctrines of grace. The arguments are worked out in greater detail here than in his later academic disputations in Leiden. It is the basic document of Arminianism.¹¹

In the first part of Arminius's examination, he endeavors to prove that unconditional predestination was not consistent with the Holy Scriptures, and in part two he sets out to consider how Perkins refuted the opinions of those who opposed his teaching. In this work, Perkins raises an issue that Arminius had not previously dealt with—the possibility of a believer falling away from the faith and perishing. Perkins charged his opposition with saying that saving faith may be lost, while he held to what is commonly referred to today as “eternal security.”¹² Arminius approaches this issue “cautiously,” and says, “That true and saving faith may be, totally and finally, lost, I should not at once dare to say: though many of the [early church] fathers frequently seem to affirm this.”¹³ He then proceeds to give “detailed consideration to Perkins' arguments for eternal security, or the

¹⁰ *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 209.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹² *Ibid.*, 216.

¹³ *The Works of Arminius*, 3:436, bracket are mine. Later on he makes the same point: “In reference to the sentiments of the fathers, you doubtless know that almost all antiquity is of the opinion, that believers can fall away and perish” (*Ibid.*, 3:438).

‘perseverance of the saints.’”¹⁴ Bangs views the discussion as a “battle of proof texts, but students of this controversy in the intervening centuries will find the discussion illuminating, with some surprising turns in Arminius’ arguments.”¹⁵

I will leave it to the reader to examine the full discussion for them self, but I would like to summarize my take on it.¹⁶ With one exception, Arminius found the passages used by Perkins to support eternal security unpersuasive.¹⁷ While Arminius affirms that believers can be sustained “against all temptations of the world, the flesh, sin and Satan, and that they may be made strong against all their enemies,” he still attaches a

¹⁴ Ibid., 217. Bangs notes that Arminius’ detailed examination covers 17 pages in the English text. Stanglin comments that “when Perkins argued that it is impossible for true faith to fail, Arminius eagerly and ably argued against that view” (Ibid., “Sanctification, Perfection, and Apostasy,” 132).

¹⁵ Ibid., 217.

¹⁶ Notice how Arminius responded to two of Perkins proof-texts, which happen to be the most popular passages used in support of eternal security still today—John 10:28 and Romans 8:35.

Let the passages of Scripture, which you cite, be examined. “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

Who will deny this? But some say — “The sheep can not be taken out of the hands of the shepherd, but can, of their own accord, depart from him.” You affirm that “this is a weak statement.” By what argument? “Because when they fall, they are taken by the Devil.” Truly indeed, they are taken, when they fall, and it is not possible, that it should be done in any other way. For unless the sheep are in the hands of the shepherd, they can not be safe against Satan. But the question is — Does not the act of departure and defection in its nature, precede their seizure by Satan? If this be so, your answer is vain and futile.

The passage in Romans 8, “Who shall separate us from the love of God?” is wholly irrelevant. For it is the consolation by which believers are strengthened against all present and assailing evils. None of these can at all effect that God should cease to love those, whom He has begun to love in Christ. (Ibid., 3:343-344)

¹⁷ “I admit . . . that this argument [from 1 John 3:9] is the strongest of those which have been hitherto referred to” (Ibid., 3:439).

condition—“if they will only be faithful to themselves and to the grace of God.”¹⁸

Throughout this discussion Arminius never once teaches that believers *do* indeed fail to fulfill the condition, fall away from the faith, and perish.¹⁹ At another time Arminius stated, “It is one thing to declare, that ‘it is *possible* for the faithful to fall away from faith and salvation,’ and it is another to say, that ‘they do *actually* fall away.’”²⁰ Arminius went on to say, “And at one time I certainly did say, with an explanation subjoined to it, ‘that it was *possible* for believers finally to decline or fall away from faith and salvation.’ But at no period have I asserted, ‘that believers *do* finally decline or fall away from faith or salvation.’”²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 3:441.

¹⁹ Stanglin says,

To understand Arminius’s position [on apostasy], two points of distinction are essential. First, Arminius distinguishes between the possibility and the actuality of the faithful falling away. . . . The second significant distinction Arminius makes is between an elect person and a believer. He remarks that election to salvation denotes not only belief but also perseverance in that faith. Therefore, an elect person must be both a believer and a perseverer. (Ibid., 132, 133)

Bangs also says that for Arminius “the term ‘believer’ is not exactly equivalent to the term ‘elect.’ ‘Since election to salvation comprehends within its limits not only faith but likewise perseverance in faith, . . . believers and the elect are not taken for the same person’ (Ibid., 349).

²⁰ Ibid., 2:242, emphasis added.

²¹ Ibid., 2:242, emphasis added. Stanglin comments:

Arminius’s clear affirmation that he has indeed taught that it is possible for believer to fall away from faith and salvation at first glance seems to contradict the equally clear statements in *Declaratio sententiae* [*Declaration of Sentiments*] that he never taught this possibility. The text as translated by Nichols reads, “I never taught that *a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish.*” Upon closer investigation of the original texts, however, this apparent contradiction is resolved, for there is no equivalent to the English “can” in the Dutch or Latin. This lack of *connen* or *posse* shows that Arminius was consistent in his teaching on this issue, and that in the *Declaratio* he was speaking of the actuality, not the possibility, of apostasy. The sentence should read, “I roundly declare that I have never taught that the true believer drifts away (*afwijcken*), either totally or finally, from the faith, and is thus lost.” Therefore, Arminius

It *logically* follows in Arminius's thinking that *if* a believer could stop believing, they would necessarily fall away from union with Christ, and consequently, from the eternal life embraced in Christ. For example, Arminius says to Perkins:

He embraces no one in Christ, unless he is in Christ. But no one is in Christ, except by faith in Christ, which is the necessary means of our union with Christ. If any one falls from faith, he falls from that union, and, consequently, from the favor of God by which he was previously embraced in Christ [unto eternal life].²²

At the end of the discussion Arminius writes:

The state of the case, according to those who argue against you, is like this. At the beginning of faith in Christ and of conversion to God, the believer becomes a living member of Christ. If he perseveres in the faith of Christ and maintains a good conscience, he remains a living member. But if he becomes indolent, has no care for himself, gives place to sin, he becomes, by degrees half-dead: and proceeding in this way he at length wholly dies, and ceases to be a member of Christ. You ought to have refuted these statements, which, so far from refuting, you rather confirm by your distinctions. You have indeed treated this subject, with less care than its dignity, and your learning deserved.²³

affirms the possibility of apostasy; whether it actually happens he seems to leave open for discussion. (Ibid., 133)

²² Ibid., 3:443, brackets are mine. The inserted words "unto eternal life" are justified from what follows:

For the question is this, "Can believers fall from this primary grace, that is, from the favor of God, by which he embraces them in Christ?" It is certain that they can not, while they continue to be believers, because so long they are in Christ. But if they fall from faith, they also fall from that primary grace. Hence the question remains — "Can believers fall from faith?" But you concede that believers, do fall, so far as themselves are concerned. I conclude, then, that God does not remain in them, and that neither the right of eternal life, nor filiation belongs to them, according to the declaration, "as many as received him, etc." (John 1:12). Hence, if you had wished to make your statements consistent, it was necessary to deny that believers fall from faith, or, if you concede this, to concede, at the same time, that they can fall from the favor of God by which He embraces them in Christ unto eternal life. (Ibid., 3:433)

²³ Ibid., 3:452. Drawing "reasonable inferences from his statements" such as the ones previously given, Stanglin writes:

Because faith is the condition for salvation, Arminius makes it clear that a rejection of faith constitutes a falling away from salvation. . . . If it is clear that explicit rejection of faith is sufficient to constitute a falling away, it is less clear whether Arminius thinks that apostasy can be the result of sins of commission. Arminius's statement . . . that "it is impossible for the faithful (*fdeles*) to defect from salvation as long as they remain faithful," has caused confusion regarding whether sins are a contributing factor to apostasy. One theologian [J. Matthew Pinson] interprets

What Arminius defends here is perfectly in line with what the later Arminian party became fully persuaded of in their “Opinions,” and what present day Reformed Arminians hold to. Believers who persevere in faith remain in a living union with Christ, but those who give place to sin, and persist in these sinful ways, will eventually die spiritually (cf. Romans 8:12-13), and cease being living members of Christ because they are no longer believers but *unbelievers*.²⁴

“For Arminius a believer who ceases to trust God is no longer a believer.”²⁵ And when asked if a believer can decline from their saving relationship with Christ he would reply,

when rigidly and accurately examined, can scarcely be admitted; it being impossible for believers, as long as they remain believers, to decline from salvation. Because, were this possible, that power of God would be conquered which he has determined to employ in saving believers. On the other hand, if believers fall away from the faith and become unbelievers, it is impossible for them to do otherwise than decline from salvation, that is, provided they still continue unbelievers.²⁶

Arminius as saying “The only way a Christian can lose salvation is by renouncing his or her faith in Christ.” Another modern interpreter [Stephen M. Ashby], who claims to hold “the view of Jacobus Arminius himself,” argues that since faith alone, and not works, makes one justified, then unbelief alone, and not sin, makes one “unjustified.” In other words, these theologians claim that only an overt renunciation of faith could cause a Christian to lose salvation; commission of sin *per se*, in which all believers participate, has no relation to one’s salvation. . . . The idea that Arminius only allowed absolute unbelief, and not just any sin, to be the condition of apostasy seems to cohere with many of his statements. However, this view falls short, first, because it does not take into account the clear passages where Arminius does connect the commission of sin with apostasy; second, because it does not appreciate the nuances of the various causes of sin; and third, because it does not acknowledge the nuances of the nature of faith in its relation to sinful deeds. (Ibid., 135-136; see full discussion on 136-139)

²⁴ “In other words, sin is an act and attitude which is incompatible with the obedience of faith, and hence constitutes a denial of faith” (I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, 197).

²⁵ Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 349.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:243. Stanglin writes: “According to Arminius, it is incoherent to simply assert that the faithful can fall away from salvation. It is more proper to say that the faithful can fall away from faith; then, as unbelievers, they would have no salvation. As long as believers persevere they have salvation” (Ibid., 134).

James Nichols (1785-1861), who translated volumes one and two of *The Works of Arminius*, and included his own notes in it,²⁷ believed that the previous statements are consistent with the author's theology,

which recognizes, *as believers*, those Christian characters alone who continue to believe and do not fall from their own steadfastness. (2 Pet 3:17) But it also accounts it possible for those very characters to imitate the change in conduct of that faithful and wise steward, described by our Lord (Luke 12:42) as saying in his heart, "*My Lord delayeth his coming!*"; and who [in consequence] *began to beat the men-servants, & etc. [to eat and drink, and to be drunken].* The Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers!" [Luke 12:45-46]²⁸

Nichols seems to be right on target with these observations. Arminius taught that the beginning of the Christian life was *conditional* upon the human will responding in faith to God's prevenient grace, and if its continuation is likewise conditional upon faith aided by divine grace, then it seems *logically consistent* that one's saving relationship with Christ is likewise conditional, and that falling away would be a genuine possibility since God's grace is not irresistible.²⁹ If a believer stops trusting in Christ, manifested in unrepentant sin and disobedience, they will *become unbelievers* and share the same destiny of *all*

²⁷ Bangs writes that "Nichols's notes, while anything but concise, are especially helpful in explaining the issues with which Arminius dealt" (Ibid., xvi.).

²⁸ *Works of Arminius*, 1:665. Marshall says concerning Luke 12:35-48, that Christians "who act like unbelievers will share the same fate as unbelievers . . ." (Ibid., 76).

²⁹ B. J. Oropeza concluded: "If there is any consistency in Arminius' position, he did not seem to deny the possibility of falling away" ("Apostasy and Perseverance in Church History" in *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 16).

Stanglin says, "Arminius was adamant that saving grace, though a complete gift from God, is nevertheless a resistible gift" (Ibid., "Grace, Predestination, and the *Ordo Salutis*," 81). Stanglin also comments: "Arminius's distinct doctrine of grace as resistible over against Reformed irresistible grace suggests that perseverance on the road of sanctification, although a gracious gift from God, is nevertheless resistible" (Ibid., "Sanctification, Perfection, and Apostasy," 130). For Arminius, "Grace is not an irresistible force" (*Works of Arminius*, 2:469).

unbelievers—eternal separation from God in hell. This implication of the conditional understanding of the believer’s security and the possibility of apostasy, implicit in Arminius, was made explicit by the Arminian party and by Arminians like John Wesley.

Arminius, Reformed Arminians, and the Security of the Believer

Arminius held that believers were secure “in Christ,” and this security was *conditional* rather than *unconditional*.³⁰ *Faith* is the condition that one must meet in order to enter into a saving relationship with Christ, and *preserving in faith* is the condition that insures the believer remains “in Christ”—in a life-giving and saving relationship with him.

Reformed Arminianism is definitely characterized by belief in apostasy, with Arminius never saying that it *actually* does happen, but the later Arminian party declaring that it *can* and *does* happen.³¹ Can a person call themselves a “Reformed Arminian”³² and still hold to *unconditional* security? I would have to say “No,” because no Reformed Arminian, including Arminius, taught *unconditional* security, and every Reformed Arminian that I am aware of, minus Arminius and the early Remonstrants, taught that

³⁰ Reformed Arminians do not believe in the type of *unconditional* security held by either the Reformed or Moderate Calvinist. The Reformed Calvinist believes that God selects certain people out of fallen humanity to be saved through irresistible grace (i.e., *unconditional election*), and those selected will persevere in faith to the end due to God’s irresistible grace. The Moderate Calvinist believes that after *one moment of faith* the believer is *unconditionally* secure no matter if they stop trusting in Jesus and become an unbeliever. There is no further condition that has to be met after the initial moment of faith.

³¹ See the very well done 13 part series at “The Society of Evangelical Arminians” by Ben Henshaw on the perseverance of the saints and the possibility of apostasy from a Classical Arminian perspective.

³² Reformed Arminians not only believe in conditional security but in total depravity, prevenient grace, salvation by grace through faith in Christ, predestination of believers to conformity to the image of Christ, Christ-centered and conditional election upon faith in Christ, that Christ died on the cross for all people (unlimited atonement), and God’s grace is resistible both before and after conversion. See Roger Olson’s book, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, by InterVarsity Press for an excellent look into the beliefs of Reformed Arminians.

believers can *actually* commit apostasy. “Moderate Arminian” would be a more appropriate title.³³ Can a person call themselves a “Reformed Arminian” and be undecided on the issue of believer’s *actually* committing apostasy? I would have to say “Yes,” since Arminius and the early Remonstrants were undecided.

Implications for the Society of Evangelical Arminians

What difference does this discussion have for those who are a part of the Society of Evangelical Arminians? The Arminian umbrella should be big enough to include “Moderate Arminians” who affirm that believers have security in Christ through a persevering faith, but who do not believe that apostasy can actually take place due to some other kind of explanation.³⁴ Arminians, both Reformed and Moderate, should continue to work together in producing sound exegetical and philosophical articles that help promote Arminianism—“God’s free grace in all and for all” (Wesley).³⁵

³³ The Moderate Arminian title would be appropriate if there is agreement with the other Reformed Arminian beliefs mentioned in footnote 33.

³⁴ SEA’s seventh Statement of Faith reads: “We believe that God’s saving grace is resistible, that election unto salvation is conditional on faith in Christ, and that *persevering in faith is necessary for final salvation*” (emphasis added). SEA does not make believing in apostasy necessary to be a member, even though apostasy is historically associated with Classical Arminianism.

³⁵ This paper was completed in December 2009, by Steve Witzki.