

**LEROY FORLINES LECTURES
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“Calvinism, Arminianism, and the Theology of Salvation”**

LECTURE THREE: SALVATION BY FAITH, APPLIED

Introduction

Though Jesus died for all, not all are saved. The atonement is not automatically applied to every person for whom it was provide. This brings us to part four of my book: *the application of salvation*. In eternity, God made a plan. At the cross God made provision. But when each individual experiences salvation, how does that come about?

The “Problem” of Depravity

Reformation Arminianism affirms the **total depravity** of human beings since Adam and Eve. We are born in sin, preferring evil to good, in willful rebellion against God and unable to change.

The nature of human depravity creates a serious problem for soteriology. As naturally-born, depraved human beings, *no one is able*, no one can or will respond to the gospel offer in faith. Left alone, no person would ever accept Christ.

We must start with this when we speak about applying salvation to an individual. Remember that David said “I was born in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” Passages like Ps. 53:2, in the Old Testament, are confirmed by New Testament passages like Rom. 3. The fact that Jesus died on the cross and that God offers salvation to all who will accept Christ’s provision is not enough by itself. Depraved human beings, left alone, want nothing to do with God.

Constitutionally, every person is endowed with the power of free choice, but something affects human beings other than their constitutional nature: the fall and resulting depravity. No person without help will choose God. So what do we do about this “problem”?

As indicated earlier, Calvinism solves this by affirming that God must first *regenerate* an individual before that person can respond positively to the gospel offer and exercise saving faith. But if you choose that solution, then you will embrace the Calvinistic soteriology as a whole. In that case, the Calvinists are right: salvation is not **by** faith but **to** faith; salvation and election are unconditional. God saves some against their depraved wills and condemns all the rest to Hell without any possibility of their salvation.

Pre-regenerating Grace

Arminians face the problem of depravity by acknowledging the need for a work of grace within the sinner to enable that sinner to exercise faith and be saved. Rather than regeneration, however, this is a work that Arminius called “prevenient” or “preventing” grace. This means grace that precedes, that goes before. I prefer “enabling grace,” or—even better—“pre-regenerating grace.”

When the gospel is presented to a person, God’s Spirit must work within that person’s heart or mind to make it possible for that person, in spite of the inclinations and effects of depravity, to put faith in Christ and accept the gospel offer.

1. This is often called “conviction,” another way of saying “convincement”—one way of referring to this preregenerating work of the Spirit that accompanies the gospel and makes it possible for the depraved sinner to hear well enough to grasp and respond. The sinner must not just hear the gospel but must be convinced, convicted, of its truths.

2. This is sometimes called “drawing”: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him.” When the gospel is preached under the convicting power of the Spirit of God, there is a tug at the heart that makes the gospel appealing.

3. This can also be expressed as “opening the heart”: of Lydia we read that “The Lord opened her heart.” The sinner’s heart is by nature closed too tightly to “hear” the truth. If faith comes by hearing, the Lord must open deaf ears to enable the sinner to hear with understanding.

4. We might also express this as “persuasion,” although that word gets pretty close to faith itself. But it isn’t quite. A person can be persuaded of the truth of something without making a personal commitment to that truth. When the gospel is preached and the Spirit does this gracious work, the sinner recognizes what he hears as true.

In summary, this pre-regenerating grace is:

- entirely gracious;
- preserves God’s personal dealings with us, enabling our wills without forcing them;
- makes faith possible without making it necessary;
- leads on to regeneration unless the sinner resists;
- requires the intelligent hearing of the gospel;
- enables both those who do receive Christ and those who hear the gospel with understanding and then reject Christ.

Salvation by Grace through Faith

Eph. 2:8,9: “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any person boast.” Salvation is a gracious work of God—even in the pre-regenerating grace just discussed—and is received by faith.

1. That salvation is by faith means that it is **not** by works. Neither keeping the law of God nor other “good works” is the means of salvation. Further, faith itself is *not* a meritorious act of some sort. We who believe in Christ no more deserve salvation than those who do not believe. We deserve Hell as much as they.

J. I. Packer says, “Faith is a matter first and foremost of looking outside and away from oneself to Christ and his cross as the sole ground of present forgiveness and future hope.” Amen to that: faith is holding out **empty** hands to God, painfully acknowledging that I cannot save myself, giving up all my own efforts and receiving salvation as an undeserved, unearned gift of grace.

2. Salvation *by faith* perfectly matches salvation *by grace*. Sometimes Calvinists say that if we make **our** faith the condition of our salvation, then we have turned faith into a work. But the Bible itself sets faith over against works and says that salvation by faith matches salvation by grace. Rom. 4:16: “Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace.” Salvation must be by faith for it to be by grace!

3. Calvinists insist that saving faith is a gift, given as part of the salvation package to those whom the Spirit has regenerated. But the Bible does not teach that saving faith, as such, is a gift. In Eph. 2:8,9 the word “that” in “*that* not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” does not refer to faith but to the previous clause; that we are saved by grace through faith is “not of yourselves, not of works lest any person boast.”

There is a sense in which faith, indirectly, is the gift of God:

- The capacity to believe is from God;
- The possibility of believing is from God;
- The content of what we believe—the gospel—is from God;
- The opportunity to believe is from God;
- The persuasive enabling to believe is from God.

But the believing itself is done by no one else but you and me. God doesn’t produce saving faith itself, as a gift, within those he has chosen and withhold it from others.

The Order of Salvation Applied Theologians speak of the *ordo salutis*, Latin for “the order of salvation.” As we talk about how God applies salvation to the individual, what is the logical order for discussing the things involved?

1. In Calvinism, the “order of salvation” is as follows:

- *Regeneration* comes logically first, is entirely unconscious, and does not involve the Word of God.
- *Conversion* logically follows: the regenerated person hears the gospel and is converted, experiencing repentance and faith as gifts of God.
- *Justification* is then by faith.
- *Sanctification* begins with regeneration and continues through the rest of the Christian’s life—including perseverance (see the final lecture).

2. The Reformation Arminian “order of salvation” is:

- *Pre-regenerating Grace*, which accompanies the intelligent hearing of the Word of the gospel.
- *Conversion* takes place upon the free response of repentance and faith.
- *Justification* and *Regeneration* logically follow. The order may not matter, but it makes sense to me that God does not regenerate a person until that person is by justification forgiven and placed in right standing with Him.
- *Sanctification* begins with regeneration and continues throughout the Christian’s life.

For the Arminian, except for pre-regenerating grace all of these, including initial sanctification, always occur at the same time.

Conclusion

I emphasize again that salvation is by faith—and in the book I’ve tried to demonstrate that this means the whole work of salvation and not salvation narrowly spoken of as justification. What does this require of us? I direct you back to Eph. 2:8, 9, and to all of Ephesians: that we are saved by grace through faith means (as in 1:6, 12, 14) “that we should be to the praise of the glory of His grace.” We cannot glorify ourselves, not even for our faith; all glory belongs to God and both our lives and our words should testify to that.