

A Calvinist says, “. . . unadulterated Arminianism is not that great and dangerous heresy . . . it is too often represented to be . . . .”

In 1824, James Nichols wrote a two volume book called: *Calvinism and Arminianism Compared in Their Principles and Tendency*. In his Introduction he states that Arminianism has “been frequently (and I may add *purposely*) misrepresented . . . .” He goes on to quote a Calvinist, “who, notwithstanding the prejudices of his party, has produced one of the most impartial, correct, moderate, and comprehensive accounts of the scriptural system of Arminius, that have been published in the English language, and one that contains a manly refutation of the errors with which that system has been falsely charged” (1:xviii-xix).

Arminianism, strictly speaking, is that system of religious doctrine which was taught by Arminius, professor of divinity in the university of Leyden. If therefore we would learn precisely what Arminianism is, we must have recourse to those writings in which that divine himself has stated and expounded his peculiar tenets. This, however, will by no means give us an accurate idea of that which, since his time, has been usually denominated Arminianism. On examination, it will be found, that in many important particulars, those who have called themselves Arminians, or have been accounted such by others, differ as widely from the nominal head and founder of their sect, as he himself did from Calvin and other doctors of Geneva. There are, indeed, certain points, with regard to which he has been strictly and uniformly followed by almost all his pretended adherents; but there are others of equal or of greater importance, dogmatically insisted on by them, to which he unquestionably never gave his sanction, and even appears to have been decidedly hostile. Such a distinction, obvious as it must be to every attentive reader, has yet been generally so far overlooked, that the memory of Arminius is frequently loaded with imputations the most unreasonable and unjust. He is accused by the ignorant and the prejudiced, of introducing corruptions into the Christian church, which he probably never thought of, and which certainly have no place in his works. And all the odium which his followers have from time to time incurred by their varied and increasing heterodoxy, has been absurdly reflected upon him, as if he could be responsible for every error that may be sent abroad under the sanction of his name. Whatever be the number or the species of these errors, and in whatever way they may be associated with his principles, it is fair to the character of Arminius, and useful to the interests of religious truth, to revert to his own writings as the

only source from which we ought to derive information concerning the Arminian scheme. And by doing so it may be discovered, that genuine unadulterated Arminianism is not that great and dangerous heresy which among a certain class of Christians it is too often represented to be; and that though it may still be thought less scriptural and less logical than Calvinism, yet it does not deserve to be reprobated as wholly inimical to the grace and glory of the gospel.

Having made these preliminary remarks, we shall now endeavour to give a short and correct view of Arminianism in the proper sense of that term. Arminianism is to be considered as a separation from Calvinism, with regard to the doctrines of unconditional election, particular redemption, and other points necessarily resulting from these. The Calvinists held, that God had elected a certain portion of the human race to eternal life, passing by the rest, or rather dooming them to everlasting destruction; that God's election proceeded upon no prescience of the moral principles and character of those whom he had thus predestinated, but originated solely in the motions of his free and sovereign mercy; that Christ died for the elect only, and therefore, that the merits of his death can avail for the salvation of none but them; and that they are constrained by the irresistible power of divine grace to accept of him as their Saviour.— To this doctrine, that of Arminius and his legitimate followers stands opposed: They do not deny an election; but they deny that it is absolute and unconditional. They argue, that an election of this kind is inconsistent with the character of God, that it destroys the liberty of the human will, that it contradicts the language of scripture, and that it tends to encourage a careless and licentious practice in those by whom it is believed. They maintain, that God has elected those only who, according *not to his decree*, but *to his foreknowledge* and in the exercise of their natural powers of self-determination, acting under the influence of his grace, would possess that faith and holiness to which salvation is annexed in the gospel scheme. And those who are not elected are allowed to perish, not because they were not elected, but merely and solely in consequence of their infidelity and disobedience; on account, indeed, of which infidelity and disobedience being foreseen by God, their election did not take place. They hold, that Christ died for *all* men, in the literal and unrestricted sense of that phrase; that his atonement is able, both from its own merit, and from the intention of him who appointed it, to expiate the guilt of every individual; that every individual is invited to partake of the benefits which it has procured; that the grace of God is offered to make the will comply with this invitation, but that this grace may be resisted and rendered ineffectual by the sinner's perversity. Whether true believers necessarily persevered, or whether they might fall from their faith, and forfeit their state of grace, was a question which Arminius left unresolved, but which was soon determined by his followers in this additional proposition, that saints may fall from

the state of grace in which they are placed by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This, indeed, seems to follow as a corollary, from what Arminius maintained respecting the natural freedom and corruption of the will, and the resistibility of divine grace.

In this way, the Arminians suppose that they get free of all the absurdities and dangerous consequences which they allege to be involved in the Calvinistic scheme; and, at the same time, detract nothing from the freeness and sovereignty of divine grace that can be reasonably considered as essential to them. Whether they succeed in these views to all the extent they imagine, may be justly disputed. But they certainly take away something of that harsh and forbidding aspect, with which Calvinism, in its broad undisguised form, seems to cloud the religion of mercy and benevolence.

It may now be proper to mention some tenets with regard to which Arminianism has been much misrepresented. If a man hold that good works are necessary to justification if he maintain that faith includes good works in its own nature; if he reject the doctrine of original sin; if he deny that divine grace is requisite for the whole work of sanctification; if he speak of human virtue as meritorious in the sight of God; it is very generally concluded, that he is an Arminian. But the truth is, that a man of such sentiments is more properly a disciple of the Pelagian and Socinian schools. To such sentiments pure Arminianism is as diametrically opposite as Calvinism itself is. The genuine Arminians admit the corruption of human nature in its full extent. They admit, that we are justified by faith only. They admit, that our justification originates solely in the grace of God. They admit, that the procuring and meritorious cause of our justification is the righteousness of Christ. . . . They admit in this way, that justification implies not merely forgiveness of sin, but acceptance to everlasting happiness. . . . They admit, in fine, that the work of sanctification, from its very commencement to its perfection in glory, is carried on by the operation of the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of God by Jesus Christ. So sound, indeed, are the Arminians with respect to doctrine of justification, . . . that those who look into the writings of Arminius, may be disposed to suspect him of having even exceeded Calvin in orthodoxy. It is certain, at least, that he declares his willingness to subscribe to everything that Calvin has written on that leading subject of Christianity, in the third book of his Institutes. And with this declaration, the tenor of his writings invariably corresponds. — *Edinburgh Encyclopedia. (Calvinism and Arminianism Compared in Their Principles and Tendency, 1:xix-xxix)*