

Abstract

This exposition discusses the earliest, historical beliefs of the Arminian theological tradition regarding the effects of the fall upon man, the nature of the will of man and the mode of grace in salvation. The primary source writings of the earliest and most influential Arminian writers such as Jacobus Arminius, Simon Episcopius, and John Wesley were examined in light of both Arminian and non-Arminian secondary source material and thus explicated according to that general understanding. Several points of interest were found, including: firstly, that Arminianism was orthodox in its understanding of the nature of the creation and subsequent fall; secondly, that it was Reformed in its teaching on original sin and total depravity according to the effects of the fall; thirdly, that it taught that the nature of the will is libertarian (unnecessitated) and free but that this, however, changed after the fall, becoming both morally and naturally bound to sin and altogether impotent for salvation; fourthly, it held to the belief that God's grace is such that it is personal, continuous (non-quiescent), exclusive, and sufficient, and resistible only through God's providence; and finally, that faith is the condition upon which God has chosen to effect grace unto saving justification, and according to that justification, bestow New Life to sinners, commencing the lifelong process of sanctification, which is distinguished from justification. These findings demonstrate that early Arminianism was an orthodox, Reformed and evangelical theology, and that therefore it ought to be represented as such in the modern, public, theological domain.

On the Aim of the Exposition

At the beginning of his pamphlet entitled *The question “What is an Arminian?” answered. By a Lover of Free Grace*, 18th Century English Christian minister, evangelist and revivalist John Wesley remarked,

To say, “This man is an Arminian,” has the same effect on many hearers to say, “This is a mad dog.” It puts them into a fright at once: They run away from him with all speed and diligence; and will hardly stop, unless it be to throw a stone at the mischievous animal.¹

Wesley’s aim with his pamphlet was to clarify exactly what Arminianism, was and to let honest men consider the factual evidence of what those persons called *Arminian* actually taught from their own writings, so that they could reach their own conclusions historically and scripturally. Such is the aim of this work. For an honest inquirer into any form of historical thought, including Arminianism, will be forced to agree with Wesley when he writes, “And how can any man know what Arminius held, who has never read one page of his writings?”² This begs for fair and honest historical inquiry.

The Reformed theological tradition is intrinsic and essential to historical Arminian theology.³ Jacobus Arminius himself was a third-generation Reformer, having lived in Europe from within the mid-16th to the early-17th centuries.⁴ As a Reformed pastor, Arminius exhibited unwavering commitment to the Scriptures alone as the sole, authoritative and inerrant rule of faith for life and doctrine in the Christian Church. But it is also evident from Arminius’ writings that he believed that his views were not only scripturally true, but also that they were logically true and in agreement with the ancient Christian Church. Considering the questions of the fallenness of man, the will and the workings of grace in the historical Arminian context, therefore, one ought to give careful consideration to the early writings of those persons from whom Classical Arminianism draws its influence, primarily the Remonstrance under Simon Episcopius and Arminius himself. Thus, beginning with the earliest Arminian creeds, the question of the historical Arminian perspective on the fall of man is necessary.

This exposition deals specifically with the *historical* Arminian understanding of a selection of specific questions relevant to the doctrines of salvation. Firstly, the fall, pertaining not only to the occurrence of the fall and its consequent effects, but also to the created design and intention of God Himself from the very beginning, making the questions surrounding the fall of great interest to research: What is the fall? How, exactly, did man fall? From where or from what did he fall? Into what did he fall? These are all addressed according to the earliest Arminian writings. Secondly, the will, both of man and of God, is considered; the nature and ability of the former in respect to its pre-fallen and fallen state, and the purpose and direction of the latter in regards to divine providence over human beings’

¹ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 10:358.

² *Ibid.* 10:360.

³ Contrary to what is advocated by many within the “young, restless and reformed” movement today, “Reformed” is *not* a synonym for “Calvinism.” Calvinism most certainly does fall within the bracket of “Reformed” as does other traditions, such as Lutheranism, Zwinglianism—and Arminianism. Contemporary Classical Arminian theologian Roger E. Olson in his book, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006) makes this point undeniably clear. See for example chapters one and three, pp.44-60 & pp.78-96.

⁴ A recommendable biography of Arminius’ life and context can be found in Carl Bangs’ work on the subject, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, (1985).

lives, making for yet more interesting discussion: Is the will of man intrinsically free or in bondage? What is God's nature and how does he relate and act towards those creatures He has made in the world? Is evil and suffering the will of God? Are there two wills in God, or diversity within the one will of God? And finally, a discussion on the workings or mode of grace in relation to how God in Christ through the Holy Spirit brings sinners to repentance: What is the nature of grace? What are the means of grace and how are they implemented? How does grace affect a sinner's life, and what is the role of grace in the believer's life? Such questions are the tone of the discussion at hand. Addressing questions regarding the historical Arminian view on the nature of predestination, election, the extent of the atonement and final perseverance—whilst being very interesting and extremely important questions in and of themselves—is not the aim of this particular exposition.

The engagement with the topic at hand is in part cordial and in another part polemical. It is cordial; for it engages in factual candour with those things that historical Arminian writers such as Jacobus Arminius, the Remonstrants and John Wesley⁵ have actually said about their own beliefs according their own writings. It is furthermore polemical; for the intrinsic design of the project is aimed at clearing up confusion by clarifying the Arminians' historical-theological sentiments to help promote good dialogue in the Church regarding Arminianism and thus putting to death all misrepresentations and sophistries which have become quite prevalent among both lay and minister Evangelical Calvinists.

The reader is reminded that this exposition is specifically *not* a biblical exegesis and that, therefore, all scriptural citations from creeds, confessions and writings etc. have been omitted except for where they are crucial for the contextual understanding of a citation. Lastly, this project is dedicated to *The Society of Evangelical Arminians*,⁶ of which the author is a humble lay member. May the LORD receive all the honour and the glory, and His people be edified. Amen.

⁵ To note, although they correlate on most things, there are some interesting differences between Wesleyan Arminianism (Wesley) and Classical Arminianism (Arminius). For a good review of such differences, see Birch W. W., www.thearminian.net/2011/05/30/demarcating-wesleyan-arminianism-and-reformed-arminianism/, accessed Tuesday 19th of July, 2011. The main focus of this paper is to address *Classical* Arminianism, or, the thought of Arminius and the early 17th century Remonstrants.

⁶ www.evangelicalarminians.org

The Fallenness of Man, the Will and the Workings of Grace

In the beginning, God created all things *ex nihilo*. Additionally, God created all things good. *The Arminian Confession of 1621* was written by Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), a student of Arminius, after the Synod of Dordrecht in Holland in order to correct what the Remonstrants perceived to be the misrepresentations of their beliefs by the Calvinists at the synod.⁷ Within this confession, creation is called “the initial and most powerful production of all things made from nothing, namely, the primeval, perfect formation of heaven, earth, sea and all things which are in them in the space of six days.”⁸ Arminius wrote that “Creation is an external act of God, by which he produced all things out of nothing, for himself, by his Word and Spirit.”⁹ Arminius noted that this was a freely willed act of God,¹⁰ and Episcopius writes that among all the creation, angels and men were most excellent, having been created endowed with liberty, holiness and reason.¹¹ Human beings however were created with double honour, such as to be endowed with the very stewardship of the creation under God in His own image. In accordance with this divine creation of man in the image, “God also truly adorned them with unclouded understanding, an upright mind, a free will and other sound affections.”¹² And again, “God constituted man so that he might have a free will, and might, according to the freedom of his will, either accord obedience or refuse it.”¹³ The purpose of the creation of man is stated succinctly within the 1621 Confession:

In fact, in that state he [God] sufficiently provided wisdom, integrity and diversity of grace, not only that they [man; Adam and Eve] might correctly use their glorious authority and dominion over the other creatures, but also that they could, above all, correctly understand the will of God their creator towards themselves and freely subject their own will (by which they would freely rule not just over the other creatures but over their own proper actions) to God as their supreme Lord and Legislator; and by constant obedience they would live not only as they wished but also in the future to be blessed with perpetual happiness.

Thus this work of creation principally leads man to understand that whatever good he has, he owes all solidly to God and that he is obligated, if he require, to render and consecrate the same wholly to him. Finally, he is obliged by highest right always to give thanks to him. For he who has nothing good of himself owes all to him from whom he has whatever he has, and he ought to glory in him alone and not in himself.¹⁴

So in the historic Arminian view, the very act of creation itself places man in such a position that he is created as a *responsible* being under God by virtue of the authority God gave to man for stewarding the creation. Intrinsic to this responsibility is that freedom of the will granted by God to man that man might know God, and in the knowledge of God, to enjoy Him and to ever praise His name with thanksgiving by rendering service unto Him out

⁷ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (2005), p.v.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁹ Arminius, J., Public Disputations, *The Works of James Arminius: Volume Two* (2008), p.41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹¹ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (2005), p.55.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹³ Wagner, J. D., An Examination of Predestination and Grace in Perkins' Pamphlet, *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), pp.104-105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of obedience to His will: “Thus was man created, that he might know, love and worship his Creator, and might live with him forever in a state of blessedness. By this act of creation, God most manifestly displayed the glory of His wisdom, goodness and power.”¹⁵ Contemporary Classical Arminian theologian F. Leroy Forlines argues to understand God’s purpose in creation we must have an accurate theological understanding of what it means to be created in the Image of God.¹⁶ Forlines explains that in the early Arminian view, being created in the Image of God constituted several positive faculties, including; rationality, intelligence, a moral nature, personhood, free will and the heart.¹⁷ As Christian theologian Louis Berkhof explains:

The image of God in which man was created certainly includes what is generally called “original righteousness,” or more specifically, true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. . . . Man’s creation in this moral image implies that the original condition of man was one of positive holiness, and not a state of innocence or moral neutrality.¹⁸

Berkhof’s statement corresponds with the early Arminian understanding that man was created as a relational being and as a personal agent. He was created both in the constitutions of the moral likeness and the faculties of the mind and will of God, his creator, in whose image man had been made. Man was created for both personal and inter-personal relationships with God, the created order around him and with himself. Human beings were essentially created for fellowship.¹⁹ Arminius explained that man was created perfect, such that the human body “would have been incorruptible, and, by the grace of God, would not have been liable to death, if men had not sinned, and had not, by that deed, procured for himself the necessity of dying.”²⁰ The soul itself is created *ex nihilo* “by God in time, as he still daily creates a new soul in each body” and it is additionally created “immortal, not indeed from itself, but by the sustaining grace of God.”²¹ According to Arminius, the soul has two primary faculties, namely the understanding and the will, and that in the primeval condition, the will had an inclination to good—a positive holiness. The will of man was inclined to wisdom and possessed understanding of the “supernatural truth and goodness both of felicity and of righteousness” having been fitted with the “righteousness and holiness of truth.”²² It was in his soul that the man most gloriously expressed his Creator’s image, for it is “natural and essential to the soul to be a spirit, and to be endowed with the power of understanding and willing, both according to the nature and mode of liberty.”²³

Liberty forms an intrinsic part of the historic Arminian understanding of the will as intrinsically designed. Arminius believed that there were very close connections between the

¹⁵ Arminius, J., Public Disputations, *The Works of James Arminius: Volume Two* (2008), p.48.

¹⁶ Forelines notes a good pastoral point here: “A Christian psychology, sociology and system of ethics must have as a part of its foundation an acquaintance with what it means to be created in the image of God. It is utterly impossible for human beings through observation and experience alone (empiricism) ever to arrive at an adequate understanding of human needs and human behaviour.” *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.3-6.

¹⁸ Berkhof, L., *Systematic Theology*, 3rd ed., (1941) p.204, cited by Forlines F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), pp.7-8.

¹⁹ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), pp.4-12.

²⁰ Arminius, J., Public Disputations, *The Works of James Arminius: Volume Two* (2008), p.47.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* Arminius also believed that if man had continued thus, it would have been passed down through the human race.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.48.

mind and the will. In his public disputation entitled *On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers*, Arminius defined the nature of the will thusly:

The word *arbitrium*, “choice,” or “free will,” properly signifies both the faculty of the mind or understanding, by which the mind is enabled to judge anything proposed to it, and the judgement itself the mind forms according to that faculty. . . . Liberty, when attributed to the will, is properly an affection of the will, though it has its root in the understanding and reason. Generally considered, it is various: [1] freedom from the control of jurisdiction of one who commands, and from an obligation to render obedience, [2] freedom from the inspection, care, and government of a superior, [3] freedom from necessity, whether this proceeds from an external cause compelling, or from a nature inwardly determining absolutely to one thing, [4] freedom from sin and its dominion, [5] freedom from misery.

Of these five modes of liberty, the first two appertain to God alone; to whom also on this account, *autexousia*, perfect independence, or complete freedom of action, is attributed. But the remaining three modes may belong to man, nay in a certain respect they do pertain to him. And indeed the former, namely, freedom from necessity, always pertains to him because it exists naturally in the will, as its proper attribute, so that there cannot be any will if it is not free.²⁴

This essential definition notes several important aspects attributed to the will of God and man, including the freedom of volition and hence a denial of the concept of necessity—a faculty which would negate any meaningful existence of a true will at all in Arminius’ view.²⁵ Interestingly, God alone possesses *autexousia*, i.e., complete and absolute independence of the freedom of His own will, implying that man does not possess such a faculty. With the will thus designed, Arminius held that in such a state of Primitive Innocence, mankind really was able to fulfil the divine mandate passed down to him (“do not eat”), and that therefore in the same state, it was fully possible for man to disobey God, should he be so persuaded.²⁶ Wesley expressed the same essential sentiments as Arminius and Berkhof in a sermon entitled *On the Fall of Man*, where he pointed out that in man’s original created state of positive righteousness and liberty, he must have necessarily had the free choice to choose the good or not:

Because man was created in the image of God: Because he is not mere matter, a cloud of earth, a lump of clay, without sense or understanding; but a spirit like his Creator, a being endowed not only with sense and understanding, but also with a will exerting itself in various affections. To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty; a power of directing his own affections and actions; a capacity of determining himself, or of choosing good or evil.²⁷

This creation concept of personhood and free volition in the will had inevitable implications for the historic Arminian understanding of the fall. Yet the problem existed that

²⁴ Arminius, J., *Public Disputations*, in Wagner, J. D., *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God* (2011), p.1.

²⁵ The concept of causal necessity pervades Arminian scepticism. That is to say, whenever historic Arminians referred to necessity, they were referring to the idea of deterministic causality, wherein (in their view) true choice becomes utterly illusory by virtue of the fact that in absolute determinism, all our actions are fixed by God’s decree such that they cannot be otherwise. If such was true, then the object of that predetermination could not be logically held responsible for his actions, since he had no possible way of doing otherwise, and furthermore, the notion would make God the ultimate cause of human sin and hence its author, which was untenable for the Arminians of history as the Arminians today. One will therefore find within a lot of Arminian material the critique or denial of “necessity” or “causal necessity.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

²⁷ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14 vols., 6:215.

if it is indeed the case that man has been created with such liberty with an inclination to positive holiness and wisdom, fellowship and favour with God, unity with himself and with nature, how could it be that man could actually fall and become corrupt? Episcopius' exposition gives a central creedal statement regarding how the fall took place:

Sin came into the world on this account. God gave to the man, being created with such faculties as we have said [liberty in freedom of the will, a moral nature, etc.] a law of not eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, placed in the middle of the garden, under the pain of eternal death and various other miseries. That law was broken, however, by Adam, together with his wife, who was seduced by Satan and deceived by his false persuasions. It was broken, I say, not so much by a spontaneous will, but by a truly free one. Because he was not forced either by any violent outward impulse or some secret, hidden determination or necessity (whether proceeding from God, or the devil) to will to pluck or eat the forbidden fruit. Nor did he fall into sin by any subtraction or negation of some divine virtue or actions necessary for avoiding sin (which some amateurishly call permission or an efficacious permissive decree). Finally, he was not impelled or moved to transgression by God through any command, order or instinct, however, secret or hidden (namely, that God might have opportunity of exercising his forbearing mercy, and punitive justice), as some perversely teach. For God would truly, properly and especially, in fact solely, be the author of sin. Indeed, such a transgression would not be true sin, neither could the man by that sin be truly guilty or justly miserable. Furthermore, God was not seeking from this an opportunity of expressing his true mercy or true justice. *But man committed this sin by the pure liberty of his will*, immune to any internal or external necessity. On God's part, only his permission entered in, and on the devil's, only his persuasion, which the man could have easily resisted and not given ear, and the external beauty and grace of the fruit going before and enticing.²⁸

In Episcopius' view, it was the free choice of Adam to sin against the will of God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from which God had commanded him not to eat. God expressed the commandment clearly; man chose to transgress that law. This choice was neither predetermined by any causal agent outside of man, nor was man compelled irresistibly to sin. This is because in the Remonstrants' view, the opinion that such predetermination was the case as an institute of causal necessity for sin would not make the *object* of that causal predetermination the culpable or meritorious cause of that sin, but rather it would make the *causal agent* the culpable or meritorious cause of sin. Therefore, to say that God is ultimately the causal agent of Adam's sin is to make God the culpable cause of sin and not Adam, which makes God himself the very author of sin, thus making God a sinner, which the Remonstrants viewed as completely absurd—a blasphemy. Therefore man sinned “by the pure liberty of his will,” or, by his own self-determination. The Remonstrants' primary motivation for denying that man was casually determined to sin by God came from their view of the goodness of God and the nature of His creation as reflective of that goodness. Neither does unfairness toward man nor free will per se seem to be the real issue. Arminius' writings agree with Episcopius, for within his public disputation entitled *On the Sin of our First Parents* Arminius presented his exposition of how the fall came to pass:

The efficient cause of that transgression [of eating the fruit] was man, determining his will to that forbidden object, and applying his power or capability to do it. But the external, moving, per se, and principal cause was the devil, who, having accosted the woman, (whom he considered weaker than the man, and who when persuaded herself, would easily persuade him,) employed false arguments for persuasion. One of his arguments was deduced from the good which would ensue from

²⁸ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (2005), p.64 (emphasis mine).

this act; another was deuced from the setting aside of Him who had prohibited it, that is, by the denial of the punishment which would follow [i.e. death]. The instrumental cause was the serpent, whose tongue the devil abused to propose what arguments he chose. The accidental cause was the fruit itself, which seemed good for food, pleasant in its flavour, and desirable to the eyes. The occasional cause was the law of God, which circumscribed by its interdict an act which was indifferent in its nature, and for which man possessed inclinations and powers, that it might be impossible for this offense to be perpetrated without sin.

The only moving or antecedent cause was a two-fold inclination in man, a superior one for the likeness of God, and an inferior one for the desirable fruit, “pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” Both of them were implanted by God through creation; but they were to be used for a certain order, method and time. The immediate and proximate cause was the will of man, which applied itself to the act, the understanding preceding and showing the way; and these are the causes which concurred to effect this sin, and all of which, as, though the image of God, he [man] was able to resist, so was it his duty through the imposing of the law, to have resisted. Not one of these, therefore, nor others, if such be granted in the genus of causes, imposed any necessity on man [to commit that sin]. It was not an external cause, whether you consider God, or something from God, the devil or man.²⁹

In Arminius’ view there is not simply one “cause” of the fall but rather a multitude of causes,³⁰ none of which actually imply fatal necessity. Though Arminius posits several intricate causes of the fall, essentially Arminius’ view is that man chose to sin freely through the persuasion of Satan, violating the clear will of God expressed within the commandment and falling into “the society of the evil one.”³¹ Arminius expands:

(1.) It [the cause of the action of sin] was not God; for since he is the chief good, he does nothing but what is good; and, therefore, can be called neither the efficient cause of sin, nor the deficient cause, since he has employed whatever things were sufficient and necessary to avoid this sin. (2.) Neither was it something in God; it was neither his understanding nor his will, which commands those things which are just, performs those which are good, and permits those which are evil; and this permission is only a cessation from such an act as would in reality have hindered the act of man, by effecting nothing beyond itself, but by suspending some efficiency. This, therefore, cannot be the cause. (3.) Nor was the devil the cause; for he only infused counsel; he did not impel, or force by necessity. (4.) Eve was not the cause, for she was only able to proceed by her example, and to entice by some argument, but not to compel.

It was not an internal cause—whether you consider the common or general nature of man, which was inclined only to one good, or his particular nature, which exactly corresponded with that which was general; nor was it anything in his particular nature, for this would have been the understanding; but it could act by persuasion and advice, not by necessity. Man, therefore, sinned by his own free will, his own proper motion being allowed by God, and himself persuaded by the devil.³²

Therefore in the consideration of the various places and parts that those persons or objects within the Garden of Eden were at the time of the transgression, Arminius came to the conclusion by order of deduction that the ultimate cause of the fall cannot and should not be attributed to God, the devil, or even to the woman Eve specifically, but rather that the fall should be attributed to the free will of the man Adam, who chose to disobey the commandment delivered unto him by God, thereby bringing the just judgement and

²⁹ Arminius, J., *Public Disputations, The Works of James Arminius: Volume Two* (2008), p.55.

³⁰ Such semantics are quite characteristic of Arminius’ writing.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

³² *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.

condemnation of God on himself and his race.

John Wesley preached on the fall in quite the same way as Arminius in a sermon entitled *On the Fall of Man*. He taught that Satan alone was the agent of influence upon Eve to tempt her to sin, and Wesley, like Arminius, pointed out that there were several causal factors within the one event of the fall such as the inner influential factors of raising doubt and desire by Satan in Eve's heart, and also the outer influential factors such as the wonder of the fruit itself. Wesley further noted that man sinned *willingly*—and that by liberty—and is therefore in full agreement with Classical Arminian thought.³³ Nevertheless, even though the choice to sin was of Adam's free volition, the actual act of disobedience was not outside the realm of God's control and providence over Adam's life. For Arminius believed that nothing in the world can happen apart from the government of God according to His sovereign purpose, and therefore an explanation of Arminius' doctrine of providence is necessary.

In his treatise entitled *An Examination of Predestination and Grace in Perkins' Pamphlet*,³⁴ Arminius expounded at some length upon his doctrine of providence, including God's government of evil. Arminius believed that although God is under obligation to no man, God is bound to His own truthfulness and goodness. Arminius believed that in God's ongoing creation role as Sustainer, God governs all his creatures such that mankind is unable to begin or effect any action, good or evil, without God's concession. Man's will is never passive or completely autonomous, for it is always influenced and governed. It is not the case however that the will is controlled, forced or compelled irresistibly by any force external to itself.³⁵ F. Leroy Forlines correctly distinguishes this influence-and-response mechanism in the will to a deterministic cause-and-effect mechanism, stating:

The freedom of the will does not mean that forces or influences cannot be brought to bear upon the will. In fact, the very nature of freedom of the will means that forces or influences *will* be brought upon the will...we are dealing with influence and response, not cause and effect.³⁶

God bestows upon His creatures sufficient grace and assistance to perform the good, but if they so choose, they may reject it. And yet they cannot choose to reject it apart from God's providence through permission and divine concurrence. In the historical Arminian paradigm, the occurrence of evil in general and the fall in particular must be interpreted in light of the fact that God governs libertarian free will creatures,³⁷ yet in any state—even in their pre-fallen state—man is only able to transgress the law of God with the concurrence of God, which is a restriction of the will by God. As Arminius wrote to Perkins:

Your statement, "as no good thing can exist or be done, except by the agency of the Deity, so no evil can be avoided, unless God hinders it," is true, if rightly understood.

That is, the agency of the Deity, being that by which He may suitably effect what is good by means of a rational and free creature, and the hindrance of God being that by which he may suitably

³³ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 6:217-218.

³⁴ This pamphlet was written in reply to English clergyman and Cambridge theologian William Perkins (1558 – 1602) who was one of the foremost leaders of the Puritan movement in the Church of England.

³⁵ Although it is interesting to note that, according to contemporary Arminian theologian Roger E. Olson, the English preacher John Wesley allowed that sometimes God may override the will to achieve His good purposes, yet justly; see Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.108.

³⁶ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.21 (emphasis his).

³⁷ Please note that we are speaking in context of the prefallen state of man, in regards to the question of how the Fall actually came about. What this section demonstrates is God's government of the Fall itself in His divine design.

hinder a free creature from that which is evil. But the limit both of doing and of hindering is such that it does not deprive man of freedom, but permits him, also, freely and of his own will, according to the mode of the will, to do good and to abstain from evil.³⁸

Arminius' view then was that the fall was only able to be carried out by man freely according to God's choice to permit the sin and to concur with the act which formed God's providential government of the situation. Arminius' belief was that mankind abused the free gift of God given to them in the divine image (the liberty of the will), and thereby abusing it, free-willingly chose to fall into sin, irrespective of causal necessity. Yet God's hand was involved in the matter only in regards to moral permission and natural concurrence. The Arminians believed that their view was biblically and logically consistent, and that it spared God, who hates sin and loves righteousness, from being made the author of sin, whilst perfectly upholding his sovereign government of the world.

Having now briefly explained the historic Arminian view of the creation and subsequent fall, it's imperative to expound upon the early Arminian concept of fallen man. The Remonstrants under the leadership of Simon Episcopius clarified their understanding of man's fallen state at length. Their writings state that as a consequence of the sin of Adam, various punishments were instituted by God on the human race both natural and supernatural. Some punishments for sin were temporal and natural, namely, physical death and harder toil for work. Other punishments were much more severe, including the deprivation of primeval happiness in the severing of the relationship between God and man, a withdrawal of immortality symbolised by cutting man off from the tree of life and, perhaps most severely, God's very own contempt. The Remonstrants were also very careful to affirm the doctrine of original sin by virtue of the fact that Adam is the Head of the human race:

Because Adam was the stock and root of the whole human race, he therefore involved and implicated not only himself, but also all of his posterity (as if they were contained in his loins and went forth from him by natural generation) in the same death and misery as himself, so that all men without discrimination, our Lord Jesus Christ excepted, are by this one sin of Adam deprived of that primeval happiness, and destitute of true righteousness necessary for achieving eternal life, and consequently are now born subject to that eternal death of which we spoke, and manifold miseries. And this is customarily and vulgarly called original sin.

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...

Not only did the guilt of Adam's sin take hold of the human race, but there also entered into man an inherent depravity and perverseness of the human heart as "Sin was not only in the world, but so exerted its power, that all flesh (with few excepted, who walked before God in holiness⁴⁰) corrupted its way, and every imagination of man was evil from childhood."⁴¹ Sin was on the increase, and evil increased and grew more rampant. This perversity permeated the entirety of man's being; i.e., for every man who existed since Adam,

³⁸ Wagner, J. D., *An Examination of Predestination and Grace in Perkins' Pamphlet, Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God*, (2011), p.180.

³⁹ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (2005), p.65. One can deeply appreciate the introductory notes of the translator of this confession, Mark E. Ellis, who according to his own testimony is "not of the Arminian tradition" yet wrote in the introduction, "Having been taught he [Arminius] was a Socinian and a Pelagian, I was surprised how Calvinist his affirmations sounded about trinitarianism, Scripture, original sin and the necessity of grace." (Ibid, p.v.)

⁴⁰ The scriptural citations indicate Old Testament saints such as Enoch and Noah.

⁴¹ Ibid.

sin, perversity, wickedness and general ungodliness flooded to the extremities of every part of each man. Such depravity does not mean that each man is as evil as he could be, but only that every part of his being is corrupt, including all his faculties and affections. As Episcopius wrote, “sin increased more and more, stimulated by the law like an embedded thorn, and the guilt of death and condemnation were so aggravated that the whole world was shut up under sin and liable to condemnation.”⁴²

And there was perhaps no more strident and strong a defender of the orthodox doctrine of original sin than that of John Wesley.⁴³ Throughout his sermon *Original Sin*, Wesley expressed that in light of the fall, it is unchristian to advocate “the fair side of human nature.”⁴⁴ He was so firm in his affirmation of the doctrine that he denounced those who believed in nothing less than the totality of man’s fallenness as mere heathens!⁴⁵ He preached that such optimism regarding man is foreign to Christianity and adverse to all the Scriptures. For in Adam, all sinned, and that all without distinction were counted as unholy sinners in the sight of God.⁴⁶ That this kind of unholiness and evil within man could be seen as only partial is flatly denied by Wesley, as he penned:

But was there good intermingled with the evil? Was there not light intermixed with darkness? No; not at all: “God saw that the heart of man was only evil.”... For God, who “saw the whole imagination of his heart to be *only* evil,” saw likewise, that it was only the same, that is, it “was only evil *continually*,” every year, every day, every hour, every moment. He never deviated into good.⁴⁷

For Wesley, original sin also implied man’s inherent inability to self-sufficiently choose the good, just as he said:

From all these we learn concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by the grace of God, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is” still “evil, only evil” and that “continually.”⁴⁸

Wesley noted that perhaps the saddest thing about the consequence of Adam’s sin was that now mankind is deprived of knowing God, and is therefore unable to enjoy that life which is truly *life*. Furthermore, mankind is compelled by the vices of his heart to hate God and flee from Him; man has been stamped with the *Image of Satan*, unto self-will and the love of the world, which leads to death.⁴⁹ And to punctuate the point:

...all men were empty of good, all filled with all manner of evil. They were fully ignorant to the entire deprivation of the whole human nature, of every man, born into the world, in every faculty of his soul, not so much by those particular vices which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of Atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will, and the love of the world.⁵⁰

⁴² Ibid., p.68.

⁴³ Wesley has within his ninth volume of Works a rather long explanatory, apologetic thesis on the doctrine of Original Sin, which I have not included here due to its tedious length. For those interested in reading the treatise, see Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2007), 14vols., 9:191-464.

⁴⁴ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 6:54.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6:63.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6:55.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6:57 (emphasis his).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6:58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6:59-62.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6:63.

Similar reflections regarding the effects of the fall on the nature of man can be seen in Wesley's sermon, *On the Fall of Man*. Here, some more light into the nature of the fall is presented, in that Wesley perceived the effects of the fall to come about as a result of divine judgement against sin, which correlates with Arminius' understanding of God's government of the affair through the providence of permission and divine concurrence. Now, the curse of God is such that men in and of themselves cannot reverse its effects due to the ignorance and darkness of their hearts. For in the moment Adam sinned, writes Wesley, he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural: "He commenced unholy, foolish and unhappy. And in Adam all died: He entitled all his posterity to error, guilt, sorrow, fear, pain, diseases and death."⁵¹

Arminius was also strong in his affirmation of the intrinsic fallenness and depravity of human beings in their fallen state. In his disputation *On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers*, Arminius made clear that in this state of unregenerate darkness, men do not receive the things of God, nor are they able to, being subject to evil continually:

In this state, *the free will of man is not only wounded, maimed, infirmed, bent and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed and lost.* And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they are assisted by grace but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by divine grace.⁵²

Furthermore, writing on the lusts of man, Arminius held that the complete, inherent fallen nature of man is such that it acts only according to its evil passions, pleasures and pursuits. His heart is no doubt evil continually; it is stony and perverse:

Exactly correspondent to this darkness of the mind and perverseness of the heart, is the utter weakness of all the powers to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil, in a due mode and from a due end and cause.⁵³

So strong is Arminius' affirmation of the total depravity of man that even the Calvinist theologian and philosopher R. C. Sproul Sr. has remarked that Arminius' understanding of the fallenness of man is in complete agreement with reformed thought:

The above citation from one of Arminius's works demonstrates how seriously he regards the depths of the fall. He is not satisfied to declare that man's will was merely wounded or weakened. He insists that it was "imprisoned, destroyed, and lost." The language of Augustine, Martin Luther, or John Calvin is scarcely stronger than that of Arminius. . . . *Arminius not only affirms the bondage of the will, but insists that natural man, being dead in sin, exists in a state of moral inability or impotence.* What more could an Augustinian or Calvinist hope for from a theologian? Arminius then declares that the only remedy for man's fallen condition is the gracious operation of God's Spirit. The will of man is not free to do any good unless it is made free or liberated by the Son of God through the

⁵¹ Ibid., 6:224.

⁵² Wagner, J. D., *Public Disputations, Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), p.3 (emphasis mine).

⁵³ Ibid., pp.4-5.

Spirit of God.⁵⁴

Sproul recognises here that, along with the other reformed traditions, *Arminius affirms the bondage of the will in sin*. And since early, historic Arminianism is by definition consistent with Arminius, historic Arminianism does not teach that the will is *free per se*. Rather, it must be *freed* (to be discussed further below).

Roger E. Olson has scrutinised the writings of a score of Arminian theologians from the 16th all the way up to the 21st centuries, and he comes to the conclusion that the will itself is really not at the centre of Arminianism. He cites Arminius, for example (about whom we need not speak further on this topic), Simon Episcopius (the author of the hereto expounded 1621 Confession and student of Arminius), and John Wesley (of whom we have also spoken). But, additionally, he cites more generally obscure examples who were nevertheless prominent in their day, such as the likes of the 19th Century Methodist⁵⁵ theologians, such as Richard Watson, William Burton Pope and John Miley, who all believed in the complete inability of man in and of himself to know the Lord and be saved.⁵⁶

And what of the famous hymn *And Can It Be?* written by the *Arminian* Charles Wesley, the brother of John Wesley, which in its fourth stanza sings:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*⁵⁷

And so within the historical melody of Arminian theology there just seems to be no room for optimism regarding fallen man. Hence “the capacity to believe does not belong to nature,”⁵⁸ as Arminius wrote. And as F. Leroy Forlines explains, in Arminianism freedom is not absolute;⁵⁹ and as accurately expressed by J. Matthew Pinson, “fallen humanity has no ability or power to reach out to the grace of God on its own.”⁶⁰

Forlines argues that we also ought to understand what this depravity *is* as well as what it is *not* according to historical Arminianism. According to Forlines, the fall did not constitute a *loss* of the moral and rational components of man, but rather it consisted of a corruption and violation of those faculties.⁶¹ He argues that in man’s fallen state, personhood remains yet all of its components are damaged⁶² and there has become a drastic behavioural distortion in

⁵⁴ Sproul, R. C., *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (1997), pp.126-128; cited by Birch W. W., <http://thearminian.net/2011/05/16/jacob-arminius-vs-john-calvin-on-total-depravity-and-inability/>, accessed 21st of July, 2011 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁵ Methodism is an Anglican holiness tradition which was birthed in the 18th Century out of the preaching of the evangelists John Wesley and George Whitefield.

⁵⁶ Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), pp.137-157.

⁵⁷ Referred to by Olson, *Ibid.*, p.161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁵⁹ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23; quoting Pinson, J. M., “Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters,” in *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought 2* (2003), p.134.

⁶¹ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.15.

⁶² Keeping in mind Arminius, who when speaking on the will was absolutely clear about its bondage—but even bondage does not mean that the will doesn’t exist, but only that it is enslaved to darkness.

man, such that his functions have been inverted, from both conscious and subconscious elements: from holiness to sin, from fellowship with God to enmity with God and from life to death, etc.⁶³ Forlines also quotes Charles C. Ryrie favourably, saying:

Charles C. Ryrie correctly argues that total depravity does not imply that people cannot do good things before God or man, but simply that those good things cannot bring salvation. Total depravity also does not mean that human beings have no conscience that enables them to distinguish between good and evil. Still, “that conscience has been affected by the Fall so that it cannot be a safe and reliable guide.” Finally, total depravity does not imply “that people indulge in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.”⁶⁴

Ryrie understands that total depravity in the Reformed tradition does not mean that man is as bad as he could be, but rather that all his faculties have fallen into corruption and death universally, and hence, in his lapsed and sinful state, man is “altogether dead in sin.”⁶⁵ Therefore as Forlines summarises, “total means that the corruption has extended to all aspects of man’s nature, to his entire being; *depravity* means that, because of that corruption, there is nothing man can do to merit saving favour with God.”⁶⁶ So in the early Arminian view, Adam was created upright as the Head and Representative of the whole human race for the expressed purpose of glorifying God, and yet by his own fault and choice Adam fell into sin bringing upon him and all his posterity the miseries of the guilt of original sin which plunged the human race into wickedness and total depravity. In their manifold perversities, man began inventing ways of doing evil, becoming increasingly evil, having been cut off from his creator God. By virtue of this universal guilt, each member of mankind was therefore born subject to the judgement of God. Now, therefore, the question of redemption and the means by which God has chosen to save sinners under bondage to darkness according to the early Arminians must be addressed.

God’s grace is central to the Gospel and thus to salvation itself. Speaking on the inability of fallen man in a letter addressed to Hippolytus A. Collibus, Arminius’ respected contemporary,⁶⁷ Arminius wrote that “free will is unable to begin or perfect any true spiritual good, without grace.”⁶⁸ Grace is the source of inspiration for all moral good, especially that which is savingly good: “this grace commences salvation, promotes it, and perfects and consummates it.”⁶⁹ Grace is of the foremost and highest necessity for salvation from beginning to end, and Arminius demonstrates his commitment to grace in his writings:

⁶³ Whereas Forlines’ description is generally good, he may have slightly misrepresented what Arminius believed. Forelines posits that historic Arminianism teaches that man’s rational faculties were not lost but only weakened. Arminius however considered those faculties “not only wounded, maimed, infirmed, bent and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed and lost” apart from grace: see Wagner, J. D., *Public Disputations, Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), p.3. If Forelines’ statement was made with reference to grace, this objection may be withdrawn; yet if his statement was made regarding man in and of himself, he is in error.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17, quoting Ryrie, C. C., “Depravity Total,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p.312.

⁶⁵ Wagner, J. D., *Public Disputations, Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), p.5.

⁶⁶ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.17 (emphasis his).

⁶⁷ See Arminius, J., *The Works of James Arminius: Volume Two* (2008), p.315.

⁶⁸ Wagner, J. D., A Letter to Hippolytus A. Collibus, *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), pp.376-377.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.377.

That teacher obtains my highest approbation who ascribes as much as is possible to divine grace, provided he so pleads the cause of grace as to not inflict an injury on the justice of God, and not take away the free will to that which is evil.⁷⁰

In Arminius' view, grace should receive the highest favour and attention, yet it is possible (and by inference, it had been done by some) to ascribe false attributes to grace and violate the nature of grace and the justice of God. As Roger E. Olson notes, "In other words, Arminius was protecting God from the authorship of sin and evil by affirming the free will of fallen people to sin without any secret impulse or compulsion by God."⁷¹[71] The question is therefore not that place of importance grace has, but the nature of grace, as to whether it is irresistible or not. As Arminius is quoted as saying by Olson:

I ascribe to grace THE COMMENCEMENT, THE CONTINUANCE AND THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL GOOD—and to such an extent do I carry its influence, that a man, though already regenerate, can neither conceive, will nor do anything good at all, nor resist any temptation, without the preventing [prevenient] and exciting, this following and cooperating grace.—From this statement it will clearly appear, that I am by no means injurious or unjust to grace, by attributing, as it has been reported of me, too much to man's free will: For the whole of the controversy reduces itself to the question: "Is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?" That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace (for I acknowledge and inculcate as many of these actions or operations as any man ever did,) but it relates solely to the mode of operation,—whether it be irresistible or not: With respect to which, I believe, according to the Scriptures, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.⁷²

And to emphasise the point:

...as the very first commencement of every good thing, so likewise the progress, continuance and confirmation, nay, even the perseverance in good, are not from ourselves, but from God through the Holy Spirit.⁷³

There can simply be no doubt as to Arminius' commitment to the primacy of grace in salvation. Arminius attributes the entire process of salvation to God's ongoing and enabling grace alone and its mode as coming from God alone. However, he did not believe that this grace was resistible. As Arminius' biographer Carl Bangs explains when commenting on his teachings, the primary concern of Arminius was to not subvert the nature of grace in such a way as to bring into question God's holy, loving and personal nature. Arminius therefore gave room for resistance in the workings of grace because he interpreted grace as the workings of a personal God and not merely the exertion of an external power or force.⁷⁴

Episcopius also stated that in light of the fallenness of human beings and the darkness of the ignorance which is in them due to the hardening of their hearts, giving them an inherent inability to repent and believe, God Himself must intervene into fallen sinners' lives. As he states in the Arminian confession:

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.162.

⁷² Ibid., (emphasis his).

⁷³ Ibid., pp.162-163.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.164, referring to Bangs, C., *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (1985) pp.340-344.

It was from this [fallenness of man] that the highest necessity of divine grace, prepared for us in Christ the Saviour before the ages, clearly appeared. For without we could neither shake off the miserable yoke of sin, nor do anything truly good in all religion, nor finally ever escape eternal death or any true punishment of sin. Much less could we at any time obtain eternal salvation without it or through ourselves.⁷⁵

This early Arminian creedal statement demonstrates the early Arminians' commitment to grace. The Remonstrants believed that salvation was the planned purpose of God in himself from before the beginning of time, accomplished in Christ in time. This salvation is by grace alone, and it is freely bestowed on those sinners who truly, seriously repent and truly believe by the efficacious operation of [God's] Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ God has chosen by his own sovereign choice to bestow upon sinful man such grace that they would be "suitable and apt to render everything which is required [of them] in the Gospel," and that such things can man not do except by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ As it is written, God draws men to himself by "the promise of good things... [which] might kindle and inflame the will of man to render obedience in acts to him. Indeed, God both habitually makes known and bestows all these benefits to us by his Holy Spirit."⁷⁸ God also bestows necessary and sufficient grace for sinners to render faith and obedience to God freely, for the Arminians believed that when sinners are called by the outward preaching of the Gospel, they are simultaneously illuminated by the power of the Holy Spirit within. It is the Holy Spirit through the Gospel who comes alongside fallen sinners to enable them to believe in the Lord Jesus, the intention of which is to really save those who are called, whether they actually believe and are saved or whether they harden their hearts and remain unbelieving.⁷⁹

As previously noted, Arminius believed that the entire controversy could be reduced to the solution of the question of whether or not the grace of God is a certain irresistible force. The early Remonstrants believed that the grace of God is in fact not irresistible, but that human beings might actually spurn God's sufficient grace and thus, by their own avoidable fault, spurn salvation. The Remonstrants released an extended critique of the concept of irresistible grace as well as some clarification of their own position, presented here as an extended quotation:

Man therefore does not have saving faith of himself, nor is he converted by the powers of his own free will, seeing that in the state of sin he cannot of himself or by himself either think or will anything that is good enough to be saved (of which first of all is conversion and saving faith) , but it is necessary that he be regenerated and totally renewed by God, in Christ, through the word of the Gospel joined with the power of the Holy Spirit, namely, in his understanding, affections, will and all his strengths, that he might be able to understand, meditate on, will and finish correctly these things that are savingly good.

We think therefore that the grace of God is the beginning, progress and completion of all good, so that not even a regenerate man himself can, without this preceding and preventing [prevenient], exciting, following and cooperating grace, think, will, or finish any good thing to be saved, much less resist any attractions and temptations to evil. This faith, conversion, and all good works, and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ as their principle and primary cause.

⁷⁵ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (2005), pp.68-69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.69-70.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.106-107.

Yet a man may despise and reject the grace of God and resist its operation, so that when he is divinely called to faith and obedience, he is able to render himself unfit to believe and obey the divine will, and that by his own true and conquerable fault, either by secure carelessness, or blind prejudice, or thoughtless zeal, or an inordinate love of the world or of himself, or other inciting causes of that kind. For such an irresistible grace or force, which, as to its effectiveness, is no less than creation, nor generation properly called, nor raising from the dead (and causes the very act of faith and obedience in such that being granted, a man cannot not believe or obey) certainly cannot be but ineptly and foolishly applied where free obedience is seriously commanded, and that under the promise of vast award if it is performed and the threat of the gravest punishment if neglected. For in vain he [God] commands this obedience and requires it of another, and without cause promises to reward the obedience, who himself alone both ought and wills to cause the very act of obedience by such a force as cannot be resisted. And it is silly and irrational to reward someone as truly obedient in whom this very obedience was caused through such an alien power. And finally, punishment, especially eternal, is unjustly and cruelly inflicted on him [man] as disobedient by whom this obedience was not performed solely through the absence of that irresistible and truly and necessary grace, who really is not disobedient. We cannot here state how everywhere in the Scriptures it is affirmed of some, that they resisted the Holy Spirit, that they judged, or rather made, themselves unworthy of eternal life, that they made themselves void of the counsel of God concerning themselves; that they would not hear, come, obey, that they closed their ears and hardened their hearts, etc. And of others, that they promptly and freely believed, that they obeyed the truth and the faith, that they showed themselves attentive and teachable, that were attentive of evangelical doctrine, that received the Word of God with cheerfulness, and that they were more generous in this than those who rejected the same, and finally, lastly, that obeyed the truth, or the Gospel, from the heart, etc. To attribute all this to those who in no way can either believe and obey when they are called, is very certainly foolish, and plainly ridiculous.

And even if there truly is the greatest disparity of grace, clearly according to the most free dispensation of the divine will, still the Holy Spirit confers such grace to all, both in general and in particular, to whom the Word of faith is ordinarily preached, as is sufficient for begetting faith in them, and for gradually carrying on their saving conversion. And therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion not only comes to those who actually believe and are converted, but also to those who do not believe and are not really converted. For whoever God calls to faith, he calls them seriously, that is, not only by an external show, or in words alone (that is, when his serious commandments and promises are declared to those that are called in general) but also with a sincere and unfeigned intention of saving them and the will of converting them. Thus he never willed any prior decree of absolute reprobation or undeserved blinding or hardening concerning them.⁸⁰

This section from this early Arminian confession demonstrates that the Arminians historically believed that the grace of God was the source of all good in anyone, and that grace is such that it imputes the instrument of faith itself to the sinner, so that through faith alone he may be saved.⁸¹ Grace necessarily takes the initiative in salvation by softening the heart and rejuvenating the will so that faith may be exercised freely by the object of grace—man. Furthermore, divine grace is such that not even the *regenerate* man can continue on in holiness without it. It really is the source of all righteousness, and God is its author, who in calling fallen human beings into alliance with Himself, calls them seriously, and not as an external show.⁸² However this grace may be freely resisted by the called sinner, who by his

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.107-110.

⁸¹ The distinction to be made here is the instrument of faith, and the actual act of believing—the former of which is given from God alone, the latter of which is done by the human being through the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸² That is, of course, a clear denial of the Calvinist distinction of the general call and the special call.

own wickedness, spurns the Holy Spirit, rendering himself unfit for salvation.⁸³ The concept of irresistible grace in the historical Arminian view ultimately impugns God's righteousness and justice in light of the fact that actual obedience is required and commanded of all men. For it would be cruel and unjust for God to seriously command a sinner to repent and believe, for whom there is no actual possibility for obedience and repentance, given that, in the irresistible grace view, it is God himself who makes that person unable to obey Him, by virtue of withholding that grace, with which the sinner would otherwise gladly have come and been obedient to him. Such disobedience would not be true disobedience, according to the Remonstrants. The question here for the Remonstrants therefore was *not* about the fairness of irresistible grace. Rather, their objection lied in view that the ramifications of the doctrine were too contrary to God's perfect justice and integrity to be true. Furthermore, they argued, the fact that God gives to those who do hear and obey the Gospel wondrous praise and yet speaks with indignation against those who, after having heard the Gospel, deafen their ears, harden their hearts and disobey His Word, is completely arbitrary and unfounded in an irresistible grace view. Therefore in defence of the character of God and his personal nature, they allowed that human beings may resist the grace of God and thus perish since they reject that which is the foundation and perfection of all that is savingly good. For salvation, therefore, human beings have the personal responsibility to yield to the grace of God and submit to Him as Master and Lord. To believe in Christ alone by faith alone is the sole condition of salvation. Christ Himself is the grounds upon which God is moved to communicate life and salvation to the individual, and only in union with and in Christ, being joined to Christ under Christ's Headship through faith alone, is a man reckoned as righteous by God and granted New Life.

Methodist minister F. Stuart Clarke touches on this Christocentric nature of Arminius' theology. Clarke notes that Arminius' understanding, the vocation or calling of God is that gracious act of God by which He calls unworthy sinners to communion with Christ through faith by the Holy Spirit. This vocation is the work of God from Himself and in Him and the object of this vocation is sinful man, who is lost, blind and dead in sin. The instigator of the vocation is God alone in Christ sending forth His Word by the Holy Spirit, the end of which is the glorification of God and the salvation of the believer through grace.⁸⁴ Clarke explains that this vocation consists of a twofold call: The external and the inward call. In regards to the external aspect of the call, God establishes ministers, bishops and deacons appointed by the Holy Spirit who are workers alongside God; planting, watering, strengthening and encouraging, etc., through the visible Church and the outward confession and proclamation of the faith. In regards to the inward aspect of the call, God through the Holy Spirit illuminates the hearts and minds of sinners by the preached Word, brings conviction, grants repentance and thereby forms the invisible Church which is made up of all those true believers who heed the call.⁸⁵ Additionally, since God knows all his works from the beginning of the world, this vocation of God was instituted from the beginning and the result of each call was destined by

⁸³ It is of course obvious from the multitude of clarifications that Arminians have never believed that man merits his own salvation or "renders himself fit" for it. What is meant by this phrase is that God chooses to not save the individual, since that individual did not yield to Him. It is an important distinction to note, that this act of grace is not a question of God's omnipotence. Indeed, that part of God's character is not in view here. Rather, the question is, "Who does God choose to save? The answer: believers, who repent.

⁸⁴ Clarke, F. S., *The Ground of Election: Jacobus Arminius' Doctrine on the Work and Person of Christ* (2006), pp.92-95.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

God from eternity.⁸⁶

Clarke writes that in the outworking of this vocation there is an interesting distinction between the outer knowledge of God's truth and His Word, the actual inner revelation and knowledge that God's word is *true*, and that it really is *God's Word*, the former of which can pertain to anybody, but the latter of which pertains to faith. As Clarke writes, quoting Arminius:

The Author of Faith is the Holy Spirit whom the Son sends from the Father, as His advocate and substitute, to manage His cause in and against the world. The Instrument is the Gospel or word of faith...concerning God in Christ, which the Spirit proposes to the understanding and of which He brings conviction.⁸⁷

This conviction is the means by which God convicts sinners dead in their trespasses and sins to repentance that they may find rest in Christ. F. Leroy Forlines captures this aspect of Arminian thought in his exposition of the condition of salvation. Writing about the necessity of the Holy Spirit to draw sinners to Christ through the Word of God, he states:

The mind, heart and will are involved in saving faith. With the mind, the truth about sin, Jesus Christ and salvation is comprehended objectively. The content of truth is grasped and understood. With the heart, what is grasped objectively by the mind is grasped subjectively...The will, out of the prepared mind and heart, sets in action the response of faith. What is objectively perceived by the mind is subjectively felt by the heart, and subjectively appropriated by the will.⁸⁸

True saving faith appropriates all those faculties of the person—the mind, heart and will, etc.—and brings them into subjection to Christ. This faith by definition, says Forlines, is the act of the human being.⁸⁹ Arminius, in his work on the condition of salvation, wrote that “when they speak of Christ, the Scriptures affirm that grace and eternal life are bestowed on us, not only through him, but on account of him and in him.”⁹⁰ He continued:

God binds Himself to offer the Mediator to the world, whether it should believe or not; but by that offering He demands faith, and by the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit, added thereto, He effects faith and binds Himself to give salvation *to the believer*.⁹¹

Arminius held that actual faith itself must be posterior to the promise of salvation and the offering of the Son, and, therefore, even given that the offer of salvation is universal, it simply does not follow that the application of the benefits of that promise is also universal. For the act of faith is that act by which man in the power Holy Spirit apprehends the One who is offered, and by believing on Him receives the benefits of His sacrifice, eternal life being effected in him:

For even they received an invitation who “did not come” to the marriage, and were, therefore, judged unworthy by God, since they “rejected the counsel of God against themselves”, and by the

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.92-95.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.96.

⁸⁸ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), pp.256-257.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.261. This is also agreed upon by Calvinist R. C. Sproul; see Sproul, R. C., *Chosen by God* (1986), p.118.

⁹⁰ Wagner, J. D., *An Examination of Predestination and Grace in Perkins' Pamphlet, Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), p.123.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.125, (emphasis mine).

rejection of the promise, made themselves unworthy.⁹²

Arminius held that as for those who resist the vocation of God, the decree to withdraw faith and repentance to a person comes *after* that decree to, in fact, bestow faith and repentance. This decree to withhold grace is a judgement of God in response to human sin which Arminius perceived in the ancient Israelites for example. Arminius did not disagree with the notion that “God has decreed in the act of reprobation, to not give repentance or faith to the reprobate,”⁹³ yet he argued that such a judgement must follow transgression if it is to be in accordance with divine justice. Arminius accepts divine hardening within the bounds of true justice, and it is just of God to “incline evil wills to evil things” through permission, divine concurrence and the instrumentality of Satan.⁹⁴

For such a hard and unbelieving person, the grace of God is *sufficient* for them, but it is not made *efficient* in them, and sufficiency can only be asserted if such is provided. Hence, sufficient grace is conferred upon all who hear the Gospel, that they may believe and be saved, but it is not decreed by God that efficient grace will be conjured by God within them should they remain stony and unbelieving even after hearing the Gospel and receiving that sufficient grace. They, therefore, have no excuse, who reject God and perish, for God’s judgement against them is just.⁹⁵ Additionally, in Arminius’ view, the *philanthropia*, or the love and fellowship of a personal God, must be considered when considering the vocation of God who calls human beings with integrity, yet gives them the freedom to reject his grace, to their own detriment.⁹⁶ Therefore, to claim that the only decisive reason a person does not come to Christ is because of God’s choice to *not* give the sufficient grace by which they would have otherwise gladly have come, is a heinous and absurd statement which would render God no less than the author of sin and perhaps the only sinner, which would be false.⁹⁷ It would be no less than blasphemy to call God the author of sin. Therefore, since God is not the author of sin, God has chosen to give human beings, to whom the Word is preached, sufficient grace, such that if they repent and believe they may be saved.

In response to the challenge of whether or not God can fail in the purpose of His vocation, Arminius answered that God, in fact, *does* “fail” in this sense: When God calls sinners to repentance He sincerely desires that they do, in fact, repent. But if an individual should not repent and therefore remain unsaved, one might say that God apparently “failed.” But Arminius taught that even if God should not achieve any one particular end, he will always achieve His universal ends, and in the case of the unbelieving God will ultimately be glorified in their just condemnation.⁹⁸

In clarification, further discussion regarding Arminius’ view of divine providence is necessary to more fully understand how it may be that God may will salvation to an individual, but then withdraw His hand from them and leave them in darkness yet still accomplish His ultimate will. This pertains to divine hardening. As previously shown,

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.125-126.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.197.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.135-136.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.149-150.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.159.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.136-137. The fact of the matter is however that it’s not that God has “failed” per se, but that God chooses to not save unbelievers, so in this sense God’s will is carried out. It is not contradictory to say that God wills at one point to save an individual, who after being spurned by that individual, then wills to not actually effect salvation in that individual. This requires a discussion of the twofold will of God. More on that below.

Arminius did not reject this concept but he kept it within what he perceived to be its proper context, namely the bounds of God's justice. It was also shown that a part of God's providence of evil includes *permission* and *divine concurrence*. But there is another central aspect of Arminius' doctrine of providence in the concept of the twofold will of God.

The twofold will of God is that doctrine by which Arminius attempted to explain God's relationship to human beings, and the different and complex ways in which God interacts with them. Arminius did not believe that necessity could be harmonised with contingency, nor did he believe that foreknowledge was the production of causal predetermination; however, as was discussed regarding divine concurrence, no act of any creature is possible apart from God's government of their actions:

I by no means take away from the efficiency of God an act which is not perpetrated by the creature without sin. Indeed, I openly confess that God is the cause of all the acts perpetrated by His creatures, but I desire only that the efficiency of God should be so explained as to not derogate anything from the freedom of the creature, and to not transfer the fault of his sin to God. That is to show that God, indeed, is the effector of the act, but only the permitter of the sin; and that God may be at once the effector and permitter of one and the same act...

I remark then that God is neither mediately nor immediately the cause of an act that proceeds from a creature. He is the mediate cause, when he exerts an influence upon the cause and moves it to cause the act. He is the immediate cause, when He exerts an influence on the act and, with the creature is the whole cause of that act and, with the creature is the whole cause of that act.⁹⁹

If any act should be done by any creature, God effects that act, permits their sin, freely and of His own will leaving to the choice of a free second cause the disposition of its own influence.¹⁰⁰ Arminius explained that in order to understand this concept of how God may effect an act yet not be held culpable for the sinful aspect of that act, we ought to distinguish the difference in the *moral* hindrance of an act, found in God's Law, and the *natural* hindrance of that same act, found in the exertion or omission of God's divine concurrence. To equate a moral hindrance with a natural hindrance is to form an equivocation, in Arminius' view, and he believed and openly admitted that the ramifications of this view included that any creature committing a sin would be doing so not only by the contingency of his own will and choice, but also by the divine concurrence of God, who knows how to permit any one act that He may ultimately work it for the good of His purposes.¹⁰¹ As Arminius wrote:

He [God] is the permitter of sin, in that He leaves the creature the free disposition of His influence; the effector of an act, in that He joins His own concurrence to the effort of the creature, without which the act could not be performed by the creature. ... God can, on the same principle, be called the permitter of the act... On the other hand, the efficiency of that act is, so much the more, to be ascribed to the freedom of the will, as it can be understood to have more vehemently willed that which is forbidden by the divine law.¹⁰²

Therefore, a sinner may only freely resist God's grace by virtue of God's concurrence, and should a sinner commit such a heinous act, God may freely and sovereignly choose to

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.234.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.235.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.236.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.237.

withdraw His hand from that sinner and harden him. Arminius' main concern in his doctrine of divine concurrence was to free God from the blasphemous charge of being made the author of sin, and to not attribute injustice to God, by attributing to God an evil act which doesn't belong to Him. Divine concurrence demonstrated to Arminius how God may actually be in control of the entire world and every creature therein without negating the ability of free volition on part of the creature, thus preserving the divine dignity without impugning human freedom.

Divine concurrence also forms an essential component in Arminius' concept of the twofold will of God. First of all, it is very clear that Arminius did not reject out of hand the concept of two divine wills; one revealed and another secret. Arminius held that it is God's prerogative what God reveals and what God does not. What he *did* reject, however, was the notion that these two wills could in any way be contradictory to one other simultaneously. For to say that God expressively commands as His will one particular thing but then casually predetermines the complete opposite of that claim according to decretive will then that forms a contrariety in God and is therefore scripturally untrue. It also renders the revealed will gratuitous and powerless. Therefore Arminius, following along the lines of Eastern Orthodox theologian St Johannes Damascenus,¹⁰³ posited the concept of the twofold will of God which he explained at length within his reply to William Perkins.

This concept of God's will creates one will with two diverse components within a conditional paradigm. God's will is divided into the will of antecedence and the will of consequence. Essentially, this theory attempts to provide an explanation of how God may will something α in a particular point in time towards any object x , but then upon the creaturely response β to God, God may change his original intention of α and will something γ towards x completely contrary to α ; i.e., God may will α towards x but when α is violated by β (perpetrated by x) God may in turn be willing γ towards x instead of α . Arminius denied that this possible change in God's will constitutes a weakness or limitation in God, but rather the opposite, for "divine power is not the instrument of divine inclination, or desire or wish, but of free volition."¹⁰⁴ In other words, this concept magnifies God's omnipotence in Arminius' view, since it consistently maintains God's power over His own free volition, and it is not necessarily the case that God must always stop willing α at the β response of x ; God has the power to will and to do whatever is His pleasure. This concept may be demonstrated in a single proposition: $((\alpha \ \& \ \beta) \rightarrow \gamma)$. This is one conditional proposition—a single will of God.

To illustrate his point, Arminius crafted an analogy: A father may desire for his son to obtain an inheritance. However, if the son acts grotesquely against the father, the father may then choose to withhold that initially promised inheritance from his son. Or, say a merchant has some money he intended to save for himself, but he then throws that money into the sea and it becomes lost. These illustrations are lesser examples, but they demonstrate the concept that God may desire to save x in one moment in time according to His α will of antecedence, but then if the β response of x to α is such that it resists Him then God may be provoked to withdraw His α grace according to His γ will of consequence and thus harden x by leaving him in his sins by divine judgement.¹⁰⁵ Arminius believed that the concept of the twofold will of God demonstrates how God may desire the salvation of all mankind according to His antecedent will, but then how, when they resist God's grace, certain men may in fact not be

¹⁰³ St Johannes Damascenus was an Eastern Orthodox Church scholar, priest, lawyer, theologian, philosopher and musician who lived from 675A.D.-749A.D. See *Ibid.*, p.247, n.5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.249.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

saved according to the will of consequence. This is because God has chosen to save only believers who trust Christ: “For if he wishes to be saved he must believe, because God has appointed that men shall be saved only through faith.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, to be clearer, God may will the salvation of a man, and so by virtue of this antecedent will, God will call him to salvation. But perhaps posit that the man who is called rejects that call and, turning away, hardens his heart. It then becomes God’s consequent will that such an obstinate man should in fact not be saved but rather that he should perish because of his unbelief and rejection of Christ. Notice that the intent of both movements of God’s will is contradictory when placed next to each other simultaneously, but they aren’t in fact contradictory according to their place, mode and application in time. For the consequent will flows from the response of a man to the antecedent will of God, and therefore the nature of the two wills is different. As Arminius wrote, the antecedent will is natural to God, but the consequent will is not natural per se since it is “conjured up” within God or provoked in response to a contingent human response to Himself in time.¹⁰⁷ Arminius believed that such a distinction in the will of God is not only historically attested by earlier Church writers such as St Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine, Hugo, Thomas Aquinas and Damascenus,¹⁰⁸ but he also believed that it is a thoroughly biblical distinction:

I reply, first, that not only that passage [1 Tim. 2:3-5] but many others, most clearly sustain that distinction of the will into the antecedent into the consequent. “How often I would have gathered your children together,” is an example of the antecedent, and “your house is left to you desolate” of consequent will. “And sent forth his servant to call them that were bidding to the wedding,” is a case of the antecedent will, “they which were bidden were not worthy” and were destroyed, of consequent will. He was also invited, according to antecedent will, who, after being afterwards found, not having on a wedding garment, was cast out, according to consequent will.

According to antecedent will, the lord commanded his servants to reckon their talents, and to use them for gain for their master; by consequent will, the talent, which he had received, was taken from the wicked and slothful servant. By antecedent will, the word of God was first offered to the Jews; by consequent will, the same word was taken from them and sent to others. The same distinction is proved by a consideration of the attributes of God; for since God is good and just, He cannot will eternal death to His own creature, made in His image, without reference to sin. He cannot but will eternal salvation to His creature.¹⁰⁹

From this appears abundantly clear how, in Arminius’ theological view, truly sufficient saving grace may actually not be made effectual in a sinner’s life, since it may be resisted if the creature should so choose, but not without the divine concurrence of God, and the twofold will ramifications considered. The twofold will is a primary and distinctive component in the concept of Prevenient Grace, which being completely illuminative, enabling and ongoing, is at its core resistible.¹¹⁰ Arminius saw this resistible nature of grace not as a judgement or detriment to God’s omnipotence, but rather he saw it as a testament to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.251.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.246-253. That is not to say that God does not possess foreknowledge of future contingencies, as Open Theists falsely claim. These things are consistent with God’s perfect omniscience and providence when considered consistently according to their defined mode and form.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.253.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.252-253.

¹¹⁰ Arminius did not believe that grace was a one-moment power which neutralised the will (that is was quiescent), but rather that it was ongoing, flowing and enfolding—like the waters of a flowing river—sustaining the will, and freeing the bonded will to come to Him. See for example Arminius J., *The Apology or Defense of James Arminius, The Works of James Arminius: Volume One* (2009), p.227.

God's personal, loving and just nature, reflected in His government of the world. Olson speaks about this concept of resistibility, arguing that it is the mere choice to not resist grace which leads to salvation: "Even repentance and faith are gifts of God in traditional Arminian theology, although they are gifts that must be accepted by a bare decision not to resist them."¹¹¹ He argues through analogy that this choice should not be seen as meritorious of salvation:

... a man has fallen into a pit and is unconscious. God calls to the man and offers help. The man awakens to consciousness. God pours water into the pit and encourages the injured person to float on the water out of the pit. All the man has to do is allow the water to lift him out by not struggling against it or holding onto the bottom. That is a picture (however homely and feeble) of prevenient grace. How could a person thus rescued boast of aiding in the rescue operation? All he did was relax and allow the water (grace) to save.¹¹²

This analogy shows that salvation is God's work from beginning to end and that it is of his merits only. But human beings must not resist the grace of God lest they risk absolute, eternal death. Arminius himself crafted a similar kind of analogy in his reply to a defamatory article attributed to him which claimed that Arminius held that faith is not the pure gift of God but depends partly on free will and partly on grace. Arminius remarked that such an accusation was simply a "desperate and confused" misrepresentation of his beliefs:

For the proper explanation of this matter, a discussion on the concurrence and agreement of Divine grace and of free will, or of the human will, would be required; but because this would be a labour much too prolix, I shall not now make the attempt. To explain the matter I will employ a simile, which yet, I confess, is very dissimilar; but its dissimilitude is greatly in favour of my sentiments. A rich man bestows, on a poor and famishing beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hands to receive it? Can it be said with propriety, that "the alms depended partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver," though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand? Can it be correctly said, because the beggar is always prepared to receive, that "he can have the alms, or not have it, just as he pleases?" If these assertions cannot be made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine grace are required!¹¹³

These analogies try to show that to merely not resist God's grace by receiving the gift of grace that is offered cannot possibly be called a meritorious work in any sense. Olson drives this point home by arguing that historical Arminian thought is such that it has an extremely high view of grace from the beginning of salvation to the very end. Grace calls, convicts, illuminates, draws and enables lost sinners otherwise without God and without hope in the world who are in natural bondage to sin to freely respond to the Gospel for justification by faith alone. Faith itself is the gift of God given to man, by which he may believe and be saved.¹¹⁴ According to John Wesley, all spiritual good in any man such as good works and

¹¹¹ Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.159.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Arminius, J., the Apology or Defense of James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius: Volume One* (2009), pp.274-275.

¹¹⁴ F. Leroy Forlines, who up to this point has been quoted freely and favourably, deviates from Arminius' own sentiments slightly on the nature of faith as a gift. Forelines writes that "[faith] is not a gift in the sense that it exists outside the person and is given to him..." See Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of*

even faith itself is immediate evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. As Olson writes, quoting Thomas C. Oden regarding Wesley's view:

...grace works ahead of us to draw us toward faith, to begin its work in us. Even the first fragile intuition or conviction of sin, the first intimation of our need for God, is the work of preparing, preventing [prevenient] grace, which draws us gradually towards wishing to please God. Grace is working quietly at the point of our desiring, bringing us in time to despair over our own unrighteousness, challenging our perverse dispositions. So that our distorted wills cease gradually to resist the grace of God.¹¹⁵

Methodist theologians, such as 19th century Richard Watson, who followed after Wesley's holiness tradition, faithfully condemned the deviations of Peter Limborch¹¹⁶ and the later Remonstrants after Episcopius, saying that they had certainly become inconsistent with the high-grace theology of Arminius. According to Olson, "Watson quoted John Calvin freely and approvingly on the subject of human depravity and the necessity of grace for every good. Against Limborch and with Calvin, Watson averred that the consequence of the Fall is not merely an infusion of evil (misfortune, misery) but a *loss* of spiritual life." Therefore, grace alone is the only efficient cause of salvation.¹¹⁷ 19th Century Methodist theologian William Burton Pope also maintained the high view of grace as Arminius, writing that grace "is the sole, efficient cause of all spiritual good in a man: of the beginning, continuation, and consummation in the human soul. The manifestation of Divine influence which precedes full regenerate life receives no special name in Scripture; but it is so described as to warrant the designation usually given of it as Prevenient Grace."¹¹⁸ There are many more Arminian writers who could be cited from across the centuries who promoted the kind of primary position to grace typical to the tradition of Jacobus Arminius, but such would be gratuitously tedious. Simply let it be known that there can be no doubt as to the historic Arminian commitment to grace as absolutely necessary and essential to salvation, since the will cannot do anything spiritually good without it, and it does not even have the natural capacity to make the choice to believe or not without it. With grace, however, the human being really *is* able to believe, and when he believes by faith alone he is completely justified, and when he is justified, and on the grounds of that justification he is granted New Life in Christ.

In his sermons entitled *Salvation by Faith* and *Justification by Faith*, John Wesley left

Salvation (2011), p.22. Arminius taught however that faith is an instrument given to man. It does not exist in a dormant state within fallen man, which Forlines seems to imply. Rather, "Whence, also, I pray, does faith come to us? Is it not the gift of the Spirit which Christ has merited for us? Therefore, the passion and descent of Christ must have preceded our faith, and, therefore, they cannot be limited by that faith. But faith is the instrument of that application." See Wagner, J. D., *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will and the Nature of God* (2011), p.243. Forlines is correct to say though that faith in the Arminian paradigm is not a gift in the sense that God believes for the person—see Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.23.

¹¹⁵ Oden, T. C., *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (1994), p.246, cited by Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.169.

¹¹⁶ Philipp van Limborch (June 19th 1633 – April 30th 1712) was a Dutch Remonstrant theologian and student of Simon Episcopius. Roger E. Olson criticises Limborch frequently for deviation from traditional Arminian beliefs about human depravity.

¹¹⁷ Watson, R., *Theological Institutes* (1851), 2:81, cited by Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.169.

¹¹⁸ Pope, W. B., *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (2010), 2:345, cited by Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.172.

no room for doubt regarding his commitment to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. In *Salvation by Faith* (preached on Ephesians 2:8-10), Wesley said that all the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man, are “of his mere grace, bounty or favour; his free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of his mercies.”¹¹⁹ Wesley considered that the fact that man is a creature created with dignity in the divine image meant that all his holy faculties come from that image and it could therefore be said that all the righteousness that is at any time ever to be found in man should be accredited as God’s gift, thus making the faith to believe as a gift, but also the free will to believe through faith a gift: “Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.”¹²⁰ True faith, said Wesley, is that which trusts in Christ, the object of faith—Christ *alone* and no other, and this faith is such that through it alone a sinner is justified by God, on the grounds of which such a person becomes born-again of the Holy Spirit, driving the born-again person unto the pursuit of holy living.¹²¹ For Wesley, faith alone in Christ alone constitutes true salvation:

Of yourselves cometh neither your faith nor your salvation. “It is the gift of God”...the free, undeserved gift; the faith through which ye are saved as well as the salvation, which he [God] of his own good pleasure, his mere favour, annexes thereto. That ye believe, is one instance of his grace; that, believing, ye are saved another. “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” For all our works, all our righteousness, which was before our believing, merited nothing of God but condemnation: So far were they of deserving faith, which therefore, whenever given, is not of works. Neither is salvation of the works we do when we believe: For it is God who worketh in us: And, therefore, that he giveth us as a reward for what he himself worketh, only commendeth the riches of his mercy, but leaveth us nothing whereof to glory.¹²²

So in Wesley’s view, there is completely nothing in man which merits salvation and eternal life; indeed all good works prior to justification merit nought but condemnation. Therefore God alone brings salvation by His own good pleasure and will. In the sermon entitled *Justification by Faith*, Wesley expounded the Reformed position of justification by faith alone. Wesley held that the question of justification is of extreme importance for every man regarding faith and life. He preached that the ground of justification itself (i.e. the reason God wants to bring it about in people’s lives) is on account of and in reference to that blessed state of joy man had in the beginning, having been endowed in love with holiness and dignity. When man fell from the transgression of Adam, God mercifully sent Christ as the Second Adam into the world as the representative of the human race to reconcile the entire world to God that He might freely pardon whosoever should believe on Him. Therefore Christ alone is the foundation and the grounds of justification.¹²³ As Wesley once famously preached, “For no one can trust in the merits of Christ until he has utterly renounced his own.”¹²⁴ Thus Wesley defined justification this way:

The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he “showeth

¹¹⁹ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 5:7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5:8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5:9-11.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 5:13

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 5:54-56.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:14.

forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past.”¹²⁵

In other words, justification is the act of God by which He absolves the ungodly of all their sins.¹²⁶ “But on what terms is he justified who is altogether *ungodly*, and till that time *worketh not*? On one alone; which is faith.”¹²⁷ Justification is by faith alone in and through the Lord Jesus Christ alone fulfilled in a perfect and personal way, for Jesus Himself is the one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice made on behalf of all sinners, as Wesley wrote:

By affirming that this faith is the term or *condition of justification*, I mean, First, that there is no justification, without it. “He that believeth not is condemned already;” and so long as he believeth not, that condemnation cannot be removed, but “the wrath of God abideth on him.” As “there is no other name given under heaven,” than that of Jesus of Nazareth, no other merit whereby a condemned sinner can ever be saved from the guilt of sin; so there is no other way of obtaining a share in his merit, than *by faith in his name*. So that as long as we are without this faith, we are “strangers to the covenant of promise,” we are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world... a *child of wrath*, still under the curse, till he believes in Jesus. Faith, therefore, is the *necessary* condition of justification; yea, and the *only necessary* condition thereof. This is the Second point to be carefully observed; that, the very moment God giveth faith (for *it is the gift of God*) to the “ungodly” that “worketh not,” that “faith is counted for righteousness.” He [the sinner] hath no righteousness at all, not so much as negative righteousness, or innocence. But “faith is imputed to him for righteousness,” the very moment he believeth.¹²⁸

Wesley correctly represents the historical Arminian perspective of justification by faith alone, noting that this faith is that condition of God on which He has chosen to justify sinners. Apart from faith in Christ, all sinners are alien to God and His promises, and the same is true for the one who trusts in his good works and not Christ for salvation—they are foreign to the Commonwealth of Israel. True faith consists of falling before Christ for mercy—mercy altogether undeserved. Olson reinforces the point that justification is by faith alone in the historic Arminian paradigm. He emphasises that in Arminius’ own systematic theology, there is precisely no merit on man’s part in salvation, as Arminius’ words show:

I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ; and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believers and reckons them righteous as if they had perfectly fulfilled the law. But since God imputes the righteousness of Christ to none one except believers, I conclude, that in this sense it may well and properly be said; *To a man who believes, Faith is imputed for righteousness through grace*,—because God hath sent forth his Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation, a throne of grace [or mercy-seat,] through faith in his blood.¹²⁹

This demonstrates Arminius’ dedication to salvation by Christ alone. However, Olson believes that this phrase of Arminius needs clarification, lest it become misconstrued: “To a man who believes faith is imputed for righteousness through grace.” Olson notes that this phrase maintains that faith is a gift, and that salvation is by grace from first to last. He shows that Arminius clarified repeatedly that faith as an *act* and faith as a *state* needs to be

¹²⁵ Ibid., 5:57.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 5:58-59.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5:59 (emphasis his).

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5:61-62.

¹²⁹ Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.203.

distinguished. As he writes, “Then, in a letter to his friend, Uitenbogard, dated 1599, Arminius said that ‘justification by faith’ actually is a kind of shorthand for being justified by that which faith apprehends—Jesus Christ’s righteousness. To those who accused him of replacing Christ with faith as the meritorious cause of justification, he said, ‘The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us,’ and ‘Faith is imputed for righteousness.’”¹³⁰ This way of speaking was another way of affirming the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. Olson further presents Arminius’ own definition of the meaning and purpose of justification as wholly a work of God in Christ for the praise of His mercy:

Justification by which a man, who is a sinner, yet a believer, being placed before the throne of grace which is erected in Christ Jesus the Propitiation, is accounted and pronounced by God, the just and merciful Judge, righteous and worthy of the reward of righteousness, not in himself but in Christ, of grace, according to the Gospel, to the [praise of the righteousness and the grace of God, and the salvation of the person himself].¹³¹

And the following from Arminius shows that this justification is by faith alone and not of works:

Christ has not obtained [*promeritum*] by his merits that we should be justified by the worthiness and merit of faith, and much less that we should be justified by the merits of works; and, in the Scriptures, Faith and Merit are placed in opposition to each other.¹³²

The view that justification is by faith alone also reflects the sentiments of the early Remonstrants:

Justification is a merciful, gracious and indeed full remission of all guilt before God to truly repenting and believing sinners, through and because of Jesus Christ, apprehended by true faith, indeed, even more, the liberal and bountiful imputation of faith for righteousness. For indeed in the judgement of God we cannot obtain to it except by the pure grace of God and only by faith in Jesus Christ (but nevertheless a living one, operating through love) without any merits of our works.¹³³

This sufficiently demonstrates that the historic Arminian perspective on justification is that it is the declaration of God the Father upon unworthy sinners as righteousness in His sight because of and on account of Christ. This justification comes to unworthy sinners by faith alone, irrespective of works, and it is the work of Christ and not of man or his will.

Justification is also the ground of New Life. In the historic Arminian view, complete regeneration, or New Life, comes when we are justified by God. Thomas O. Summers was representative of historic Arminian thought when he said that “God alone regenerates the soul; but he will not regenerate anyone whom he does not justify—and God alone justifieth; but he will not justify any one who does not renounce his sins by repentance, and embrace the Saviour, by faith. We need hardly say that no one can repent or believe without the aid of God’s grace, yet God can neither repent nor believe for any man.”¹³⁴ Wesley in his sermon

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.205.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.205, citing Arminius, J., *Disputations of Some of the Principle Subjects of the Christian Religion*, Works, 2:256.

¹³² Ibid., p.207, citing Arminius, J., *The Private Disputations of James Arminius*, Works, 2:407-408.

¹³³ Ellis, M. A., *The Arminian confession of 1621* (2005), p.110.

¹³⁴ Summers, T. O., *Systematic Theology* (1888), 2:34; quoted by Olson, R. E., *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006), p.120.

entitled *On the New Birth* preached that justification and the New Birth are both fundamental, essential doctrines of the Christian faith. He preached that neither one is prior to the other in time, but that, logically, justification should precede the New Birth, since it is on account of justification that God reckons us righteous as if we had completely fulfilled the law, God thereby bringing us into favour with Himself.¹³⁵ He preached that the New Birth is that necessary and essential work of God's Spirit to redeem us from the darkness, death and bondage to decay brought about by the fall in Christ, "From hence it manifestly appears, what is the nature of the new birth. It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.... In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into "the mind that was in Christ."¹³⁶ The New Birth is necessary for the fact that without holiness no one shall see the Lord. Wesley taught that the New Birth inclines Christians to live lives of holiness in order to please God, such that the one who is born again really does desire to do holy things, because the Holy Spirit lives within his heart. New Life is therefore the foundation of true happiness, for true happiness is found only in holiness.¹³⁷

Obtaining the New Birth is, like justification, by faith alone; not by baptism nor by works.¹³⁸ Like Wesley preached, "Go to Church twice a day; go to the Lord's Table every week; say ever so many prayers in private; hear ever so many good sermons; read ever so many good books; still, "you must be born again."¹³⁹ F. Leroy Forlines also gets it right when he says that "Regeneration is the first step in sanctification. ... Without regeneration there would be no sanctification. Regeneration is solely the work of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴⁰ And again, "The Holy Spirit is the sole agent who performs the act of regeneration. ... This means that regeneration is solely a divine work. Since it is solely the work of God it is monergistic. God is the cause. Regeneration is the effect."¹⁴¹

So in historic Arminian thought, first we are justified and then we become born again; and when this New Life is imparted to us by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit,¹⁴² then begins the process of sanctification, which will now be touched on briefly.¹⁴³

F. Leroy Forlines expounds his opinion regarding sanctification thusly: "At conversion, we receive justification and sanctification simultaneously. While both are received at the same time, justification is logically prior to sanctification and makes sanctification possible. Sanctification is *dependent* on justification. Justification is *not dependent* on sanctification. Justification is dependent on the death and righteousness of Christ."¹⁴⁴ He goes on to explain

¹³⁵ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 2:65.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:71.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:72-73.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:73-74. Wesley was agreed with the Catechism of the reformed Anglican Church; namely that baptism is not the same as New Life and nor does it cause New Birth to occur in a person's life. Rather, baptism serves to function only as an outward sign of an inner reality which comes by faith alone.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:77.

¹⁴⁰ Forlines, F. L., *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (2011), p.293.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.295.

¹⁴² It should also be noted that this personal nature of the New Birth when the Holy Spirit Himself comes to dwell within us is characteristic of the traditional Arminian regard of grace as the personal work of a personal God, and not merely some outward power that God uses to "zap" people into obedience.

¹⁴³ A more detailed exposition can be found in the ninth chapter of *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* by Roger E. Olson, pp.200-220. One of the essential key premises of the chapter is to demonstrate that, historically, Classical Arminianism maintains the distinction between justification and sanctification as the Reformed-Evangelical tradition has.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.274 (emphasis his).

that by virtue of this sanctification Christians are gradually made holier as they are transformed into the image of Christ. Increasingly, Christians are communicated deeper into a personal relationship with God, growing in strength, wisdom, knowledge, power, love, steadfastness, perseverance and all the benefits of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

It has been demonstrated that historic, Classical Arminianism has traditionally fallen into the bracket of the Reformed-Evangelical tradition in its holding to the Reformation principles of salvation by grace alone, in Jesus Christ alone, through faith alone. Classical Arminianism teaches that in the very beginning, God created the world and everything in it very good. He created all his creatures with holy faculties, and especially man, whom God created in the Image of God, imbued with the liberty of the freedom of the will that man might steward the creation responsibility under God as Lord. This was so that through their free obedience to him, they might honour, praise and glorify His name with thanksgiving.

However, Adam, abusing his God-given liberty, rebelled against God his Creator and thereby fell into sin willingly through the Devil's false persuasions, resulting in spiritual darkness and depravity which permeated his entire being, making him devoid of the light of God, thus bringing death—both temporal and eternal—to the human race. Adam communicated this sin to all of his posterity, thereby bringing guilt and condemnation to the entire human race, since Adam represented mankind before God. All born in Adam are therefore born subject to the guilt of Adam's sin and the depravity of his nature, which is original sin and total depravity, respectively.

Yet God out of great mercy and compassion for his fallen creatures sent Jesus Christ into the world that he might be a mediator and represent mankind before God as the Second Adam by dying on the cross and thereby drawing all men unto him through the Holy Spirit. This mode of this calling or vocation is Prevenient Grace, by which God illuminates the mind and heart through the preached Word of the Gospel, thereby softening and enabling otherwise unable fallen and rebellious sinners to hear and believe the Gospel.

But this grace is also resistible by the providence of God in divine concurrence. Should a man so resist the Holy Spirit, God may choose, according to that twofold distinction of the will of God, to remove His hand from the sinner and leave him hardened in his sins according to the will of consequence given the sinner's response to God's will of antecedence. Should a man believe in Christ's name by faith alone, however, he is completely justified by God, becoming born-again of the Holy Spirit and thus obtaining sanctification from God, which will be on the increase throughout all his life as he perseveres in faith, hope and love. Therefore, in closing, the words of John Wesley express an assured truth and proclamation that all Christians—including the Arminians—have always believed: "Now, thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power and might, for ever and ever. Amen."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Wesley, J., *The Works of John Wesley, Third Edition: Complete and Unabridged*, (2007), 14vols., 5:16.

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