



**Not Freewill
But**

Free Grace

**A BLOCK COMPARISON OF WESLEY-ARMINIANISM WITH CALVINISM
BASED UPON THE TULIP**

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PREFACE

The acrostic TULIP is well known by those interested in this issue and so I will use it as the bases of this comparison. I personally do not like to debate with Calvinist on their own terms because I do not accept some of their definitions or dichotomies. Calvinist often set up the comparison in terms of divine sovereignty versus human freewill. As a Wesley-Arminian, I do believe that God has delegated to humanity certain responsibilities but this has little to do with the matter of an individual's salvation. The fact that a thief truly has autonomous freewill does not change the fact that he is condemned for thievery. Human freewill subjects us to a greater judgment and does not substantively contribute to our justification. The more autonomous freewill a thief has the greater is his guilt before God and the law.

Freewill does not aid man's search for self-justification. Many criminals take the opposite tack before the court. They will argue that they were not in control of their faculties. They were insane at the time of the crime, or they were too young to understand what they were doing. Even children will say, "The devil made me do it." They seek a justified acquittal by denying their freewill or responsibility.

The more one believes that he can escape from his responsibilities; the greater is his delusion that he will not be held accountable. Unfortunately, man is made in the image of God and is responsible to represent God on this earth. God is our Sovereign and will hold us each responsible for the manner in which we represented His Glory.

Contrary to the Calvinist's portrayal of Arminian theology as stating that man is saved by freewill, Wesley-Arminianism states that mankind is condemned because we have freewill. In sum, our freewill is the bases upon which God condemns us for our sins. It does not bring us to salvation. We have each gone our own way and have rebelled against our Sovereign.

Therefore, the debate between Calvinist and Wesley-Arminians does not center on freewill. Instead, a main point of contention is the nature of grace, itself. Both systems are theologies of grace. But Wesley-Arminian understanding of grace is different from that of Calvinism. Calvinism limits salvific grace by limiting the atonement and makes grace dictatorial by making it irresistible. Wesley-Arminianism views all of God's grace as freely given for the salvation of totally deprived sinners.

Yet, the fact remains that most people who are interested in this subject know acrostic of the TULIP. Let us review it: "T" stands for Total Depravity; "U" for Unconditional Election; "L" for Limited Atonement; "I" for Irresistible Grace; and "P" for Perseverance of the Saints. Furthermore, the historical roots of Wesley-Arminianism are planted reformed theology. Therefore, this acrostic is a good tool for a comparison between Wesley-Arminianism and Calvinism.

THE BEGINNING POINT

**Both systems diagnose the human condition in the same manner.
The Problem with humanity is its state of Total Depravity.**

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The Total of man's being is affected by the fall or his rebellion. The spiritual and the material parts of man are depraved of purity, wholeness, wellness, righteousness, and godliness. No part of man is unaffected. The effect of this depravity is that man cannot truly do any good. Every deed that man does is tainted by some evil. Thus even the good which he attempts is mere filthy rags compared to the glory of God. Man cannot conform to God's minimum standards and is even less able to do any meritorious work before God. The defect of sin condemns mankind to death. Finally, mankind is so bent on rebellion against God that he does not seek or properly honor God. He travels along the broad way blindly following his own passions and loves unto his own destruction.

THE PLANS

Both Wesley-Arminians and Calvinist agree on the inability of man to save himself because of his rebellion and of the pervasive corruption of sin. Both agree that God foresaw the fall of man even before He created. Since God knew that man would fall, He set in motion a plan to redeem individuals. The two systems differ in their understanding of God's plan and method of redemption. Calvinism describes God's plan as an act of Unconditional Election, while Wesley-Arminianism describes God's plan as one of Corporate or Conditional Election.

CORPORATE ELECTION

Wesley-Arminians understand God as corporately electing all who are in Christ unto salvation. God decided only to save those who covenant with Christ which is conditioned upon repentance of one's rebellion and of placing one's faith in Christ. None deserve redemption, but God freely offers it to people anyway. Only to those who believe in the only Begotten Son of God does God give the right to become the Sons of God.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Calvinists understand God as unconditionally electing certain individual unto salvation. God knew every person who would exist from the beginning of time and elected certain ones to be redeemed as a demonstration of His mercy and glory. None deserve redemption, but God in His mercy will save a few.

THE MEANS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

Since the plans are different, the types of grace for accomplishing the redemption of individuals are different. For Calvinist, redemption is brought to individuals by Irresistible Grace. Wesley-Arminians see God as preparing the way of salvation and drawing unregenerated men to Himself by pre-event or Prevenient Grace.

PREVENIENT GRACE

God's work of salvation has three distinct movements. The first movement is the God's mercy in delaying judgment. His mercy does execute humans when they sin. He allows humanity to live so that some may have time to learn of the evil in their hearts. The second movement is the provision of the means of redemption or the atonement. God brought forth Christ in the fullness of time. Without the life and death of Jesus there would be no atonement for humanity's sin. There would be no object for men to place their faith for salvation. Christ is the gift of faith. The third movement is the work of the Holy Spirit among the unregenerated men. The Holy Spirit convicts men of their sins and shows them their need for God. He draws men to repent of their sin, convinces them to submit to Christ, and enables them to place their faith in Jesus.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Salvation is solely a matter of divine choice according to Calvinism thus grace is merely an assertion of the divine will. God's work is irresistible for those whom He chooses. God regenerates those whom He has chosen and thus gives them faith. The regenerated person then naturally desires God and seeks Christ in faith.

ORDO SALUTIS

Pre-event Grace
 ↓↓
 Conviction and Repentance of Sin
 ↓↓
 Faith in Christ
 ↓↓
 Regeneration & Justification

ORDO SALUTIS

Irresistible Grace
 ↓↓
 Regeneration
 ↓↓
 Faith in Christ
 ↓↓
 Justification

Not only are the natures of grace different but so are the means of salvation distinct. Both agree that the means of salvation is the atoning work of Christ. Without the shedding of Christ's blood there would be no forgiveness of sin. Sinners are justifiably acquitted by Christ's full payment for sin. Where the two differ is the actual value of the atonement. Calvinism limits the value; Wesley-Arminianism does not.

UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Since God potentially offers salvation to all men, His atonement is able to cover all sin. None will ever be rejected because of a short fall in the atonement. None will be ever able to say that God had not made adequate preparation for their salvation. If they do not find God's grace, it was not due to any deficiency in God's work or grace.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Calvinism limits the value of the atonement to the actual cost for redeeming the predestined elect. Since God is only applying the atonement to those whom He a predestined, He did not have to make a sacrifice or payment designed to cover those who would never be regenerated. Christ only died for the elect.

THE RESULTS

Both Calvin and Wesley expected the believer to persevere in the faith. The Christian life is not an option. The Holy Spirit works in the life of the regenerated, remaking them into the image of Christ. Calvinists see the process as unalterable among the regenerated and unattainable for all others. Wesley-Arminians see the process not only attainable for all who believe but even exhorts all to seek it in Christ.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Wesley-Arminianism states that if you have repented of your sins and if you are trusting that Jesus has paid for your sins then you are called to submit to Christ as the Lord. Those who persevere in this faith will see the Holy Spirit complete His work in their lives.

For Calvin, the elect will persevere unto the end because God has regenerated them and will accomplish His work in them. Those who profess faith and live holy lives for a season and then later fall away do so because they were not one of the elect. Their apostasy shows that they were never regenerated.

Note, this is different from the common American belief that once one professes a sincere faith in Christ one's salvation is secure in Christ. Thus Once a believer professes faith, he is always saved. For Calvinism the question is not of belief, but one of regeneration.

CONCLUSION

The point of difference between Calvin and Wesley is really the question of grace and responsibility. Wesley-Arminians recognize that every individual is responsible for his own condemnation because he has refused to acknowledge his own sin and does not trust in Christ's atonement. He does not have to be condemned because God freely offers grace to all. To all who believe, God gives the power to become the sons of God. Calvinists limit God's saving work to those whom He has elected to be regenerated from their fallen and condemned state.