

## **Module 403: Arminius**

*"Nine Questions, exhibited by the Deputies of the Synod..."* From *The Works of James Arminius*, Vol I. Public Domain, as found at Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Introduced and edited by Dan Graves.

**“The scriptures know no election by which God precisely and absolutely has determined to save anyone without having first considered him as a believer.”**

### **Module Introduction: Arminius**

Adapted from the introductory biography in his *Works*.

**Born in 1560, James (or Jacob) Arminius, lost his father in infancy. A compassionate clergyman educated the boy. While Arminius was at the University of Marburg, the Spanish destroyed his native town. He returned home to find his mother, brother and sister among those who were massacred.**

**That same year, 1575, the University of Leyden was formed. He entered as a student, rising high in the estimation of his instructors and fellow students. The municipal authorities of Amsterdam assumed the expense of his academic studies, in return for his pledge to spend the remainder of his life to the service of Amsterdam’s church. He began his public ministry in 1588.**

**A year later the ecclesiastical senate of Amsterdam made a fateful request when they asked Arminius to respond to the teachings of Dirck Coornhert. Coornhert was a God-loving man, who had risked his life for his country and the Reformation, but rejected some of Calvin’s doctrines on predestination, justification, and punishment of heretics by death.**

**Weighing the arguments, Arminius thought Coornhert right, but would not commit himself until he had made a diligent study of the scriptures, the early church fathers, and later divines. As a result, he adopted the theory of predestination which bears his name.**

**For fourteen years Arminius’ ministered at Amsterdam with**

success and popularity, although his theological views sometimes brought him into collision with Calvinist ministers.

Near the end of 1602, a death having opened the professorship of Divinity at Leyden, the curators invited Arminius to fill the chair. Amsterdam was reluctant to release him from his contract, and he was willing to stay, but in the end the authorities not only agreed to the move, but even guaranteed his wife a pension.

His efforts to turn the students from scholastic quarrels to Bible studies, and his views on predestination, led to accusations that he was introducing innovations. Arminius endured these attacks peaceably, and did not publicly defend himself until 1608.

In 1609 his health broke down, and, suffering great pain, he died at the age of forty-nine, remaining cheerful to the end, and acquiescent to the will of God.

His theological system, known as Arminianism, is charged by its opponents with five errors: (1) That it denies original sin; (2) That it denies justification by faith; (3) That it denies absolute predestination; (4) That it denies the grace of God to be irresistible; and, (5) That it affirms a believer may fall from grace.

According to John Wesley, himself an Arminian, "No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted either original sin, or justification by faith, in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done. These two points, therefore, are to be set out of the question: In these both parties agree."

Where they disagree is in the third point. Said Wesley, "The former believe absolute, the latter only conditional, predestination." This necessarily affects the answer the theologian gives to the final two questions.

The following selection from the works of Arminius is presented because it briefly expresses his views. Intended as a terse reply to specific questions, it does not appeal to scripture as often as his works usually did.

*NINE QUESTIONS Exhibited, by the Deputies of the Synod,*

*to Their Lordships the Curators of the University of Leyden, for the Purpose of Obtaining an Answer to each of them from the Professors of Divinity; and the Replies which James Arminius Gave to them, in November, 1605, with Other Nine Opposite Questions*

## **THE NINE QUESTIONS: NINE OPPOSITE QUESTIONS**

**Deputies' Question 1.** Which is first, election, or faith truly foreseen, so that God elected his people according to faith foreseen?

**Arminius' Counter Question 1.** Is the decree "for bestowing faith on any one," previous to that by which is appointed "the necessity of faith to salvation?"

### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 1

The equivocation in the word "election," makes it impossible to answer this question in any other manner, than by distinction. If therefore "election" denotes "the decree which is according to election concerning the justification and salvation of believers," I say election is prior to faith, as being that by which faith is appointed as the means of obtaining salvation. But if it signifies "the decree by which God determines to bestow salvation on some one," then faith foreseen is prior to election. For as believers alone are saved, so only believers are predestinated to salvation. But the scriptures know no election by which God precisely and absolutely has determined to save anyone without having first considered him as a believer. For such an election would be at variance with the decree by which he hath determined to save none but believers.

### QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 2.** If it be said, "that God, by his eternal decree, has determined and governs all things and

every thing, even the depraved wills of men, to appointed good ends," does it follow from this, that God is the author of sin?

**Arminius' Counter Question 2.** Is "to determine or direct all things and every thing, even the depraved wills of men, to appointed good ends," the same thing as "to determine that man be made corrupt, by which a way may be opened for executing God's absolute decree concerning damning some men through wrath, and saving others through mercy?"

#### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 2

Sin is the transgression of the law; therefore, God will be the author of sin if He cause any man to transgress the law. This is done by denying or taking away what is necessary for fulfilling the law, or by impelling men to sin. But if this "determination" be that of a will which is already depraved, since it does not signify the denying or the removing of grace nor a corrupt impelling to sin, it follows, that the consequence of this cannot be that God is the author of sin. But if this "determination" denote the decree of God by which He resolved that the will should become depraved, and that man should commit sin, then it follows from this that God is the author of sin.

#### QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 3.** Does original sin, of itself, render man obnoxious to eternal death, even without the addition of any actual sin? Or is the guilt of original sin taken away from all and every one by the benefits of Christ the Mediator?

**Arminius' Counter Question 3.** If some men are condemned solely on account of the sin committed by Adam, and others on account of their rejection of the Gospel, are there not two peremptory decrees concerning the damnation

of men, and two judgments, one legal, the other evangelical?

### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 3

Those things which in this question are placed in opposition to each other, easily agree together. For original sin can render man obnoxious to eternal death, and its guilt can be taken away from all men by Christ. Indeed, in order that guilt may be removed, it is necessary that men be previously rendered guilty. But to reply to each part separately: It is perversely said, that "original sin renders a man obnoxious to death," since that sin is the punishment of Adam's actual sin, which punishment is preceded by guilt, that is, an obligation to the punishment denounced by the law. With regard to the second member of the question, it is very easily answered by the distinction of the soliciting, obtaining, and the application of the benefits of Christ. For as a participation of Christ's benefits consists in faith alone, it follows that, if among these benefits "deliverance from this guilt" be one, believers only are delivered from it, since they are those upon whom the wrath of God does not abide.

### QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 4.** Are the works of the unregenerate, which proceed from the powers of nature, so pleasing to God, as to induce Him on account of them to confer supernatural and saving grace on those who perform them?

**Arminius' Counter Question 4.** Are a serious consciousness of sin, and an initial fear so pleasing to God, that by them He is induced to forgive sins, and to create a filial fear?

### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

Christ says, "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Not, indeed, because such is the worthiness and the excellence of the use of any blessing conferred by God, either according to nature or to grace, that God should be moved by its merits to confer greater benefits; but, because such are the benignity and liberality of God, that, though these works are unworthy, yet He rewards them with a larger blessing. Therefore, as the word "pleasing" admits of two meanings, we can reply to the question proposed in two ways — either affirmatively, if that word be viewed as signifying "to please," "to find favor in his eyes," and "to obtain complacency for itself;" or negatively if "placeo" be received for that which it also signifies, "to please by its own excellence." Yet it might be said, that good works are rewarded, in a moral view, not so much through the powers of nature, as by some operation in them of the Holy Spirit.

#### QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 5.** Can God now, in his own right, require faith from fallen man in Christ, which he cannot have of himself? But does God bestow on all and every one, to whom the Gospel is preached, sufficient grace by which they may believe, if they will?

**Arminius' Counter Question 5.** Can God require that man to believe in Jesus Christ, for whom He has determined by an absolute decree that Christ should not die, and to whom by the same decree He has determined to refuse the grace necessary for believing?

#### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

The parts of this question are not opposed to each other; on the contrary, they are at the most perfect agreement. So that the latter clause may be considered the rendering of a reason, why God may require from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself. For God may require this, since he has determined to bestow on man sufficient grace

by which he may believe. Perhaps, therefore, the question may be thus corrected: "Can God, now, in his own right, demand from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself, though God neither bestows on him, nor is ready to bestow, sufficient grace by which he may believe?" This question will be answered by a direct negative. God cannot by any right demand from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself, except God has either bestowed, or is ready to bestow, sufficient grace by which he may believe if he will. Nor do I perceive what is false in that reply, or to what heresy it has affinity. It has no alliance with the Pelagian heresy: for Pelagius maintained, that with the exception of the preaching of the Gospel, no internal grace is required to produce faith in the minds of men. But what is of more consequence, this reply is not opposed to St. Augustine's doctrine of Predestination; "yet this doctrine of his, we do not account it necessary to establish," as Innocent, the Roman Pontiff, has observed.

#### QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 6.** Is justifying faith the effect and the mere gift of God alone, who calls, illuminates, and reforms the will? and is it peculiar to the elect alone from all eternity?

**Arminius' Counter Question 6.** Can that be called a mere gift which, though offered by the pure liberality of Him who makes the offer, is still capable of being rejected by him to whom it is offered? But does a voluntary acceptance render it unworthy of the name of a gift? It may likewise be asked, "Is faith bestowed on these who are to be saved? Or is salvation bestowed on those who have faith?" Or can both these questions be answered affirmatively in a different respect? If they can, how is it then that there is not in those decrees a circle, in which nothing is first and nothing last?

#### ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

A double question requires a double answer.

(1.) To the first I reply, Faith is the effect of God illuminating the mind and sealing the heart, and it is his mere gift.

(2.) To the second I answer, by making a distinction in the word election. If it be understood as signifying election to salvation; since this, according to the scriptures, is the election of believers, it cannot be said, "Faith is bestowed on the elect, or on those who are to be saved," but that "believers are elected and saved." But if it be received for the decree by which God determines variously to administer the means necessary to salvation; in this sense I say that faith is the gift of God, which is conferred on those only whom He hath chosen to this, that they may hear the word of God, and be made partakers of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 7.** May every one who is a true believer be assured in this life of his individual salvation; and is it his duty to have this assurance?

**Arminius' Counter Question 7.** Does justifying faith precede, in the order of nature, remission of sins, or does it not? And can any man be bound to any other faith than that which justifies?

ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

Since God promises eternal life to all who believe in Christ, it is impossible for him who believes, and who knows that he believes, to doubt of his own salvation, unless he doubts of this willingness of God [to perform his promise.] But God does not require him to be better assured of his individual salvation as a duty which must be performed to himself or to Christ; but it is a consequence of that promise, by which God engages to bestow eternal life on him who believes.

## QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 8.** May true believers and elect persons entirely lose faith for a season?

**Arminius' Counter Question 8.** May any man who has faith and retains it, arrive at such a moment, as, if he were then to die, he would be damned?

## ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Since election to salvation comprehends within its limits not only faith, but likewise perseverance in faith; and since St. Augustine says, "God has chosen to salvation those who he sees will afterwards believe by the aid of his preventing or preceding grace, and who will persevere by the aid of his subsequent or following grace; "believers and the elect are not correctly taken for the same persons. Omitting, therefore, all notice of the word "election," I reply, believers are sometimes so circumstanced, as not to produce, for a season, any effect of true faith, not even the actual apprehension of grace and the promises of God, nor confidence or trust in God and Christ; yet this is the very thing which is necessary to obtain salvation. But the apostle says, concerning faith, in reference to its being a quality and a capability of believing, "some, having cast away a good conscience concerning faith, have made shipwreck."

## QUESTION OPPOSITE QUESTION

**Deputies' Question 9.** Can believers under the grace of the New Covenant, perfectly observe the law of God in this life?

**Arminius' Counter Question 9.** May God, or may He not, require of those who are partakers of the New Covenant, that the flesh do not lust against the Spirit, as a duty corresponding with the grace of that covenant?

## ARMINIUS' ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

The performance of the law is to be estimated according to the mind of Him who requires it to be observed. The answer will be two-fold, since He either wills it to be rigidly observed in the highest degree of perfection, or only according to epieikeian clemency; that is, if he require this according to clemency, and if the strength or powers which he confers be proportionate to the demand.

(1.) Man cannot perfectly perform such a law of God, if it be considered as to be performed according to rigor.

(2.) But if he require it according to clemency, and if the powers conferred be proportionate, (which must be acknowledged, since He requires it according to the evangelical covenant,) the answer is, it can be perfectly observed. But the question about capability is not of such great importance, "provided a man confesses that it is possible to be done by the grace of Christ," as St. Augustine justly observes.

### **REMARKS ON THE PRECEDING QUESTIONS, AND ON THOSE OPPOSED TO THEM**

In reply to some queries which Uytenbogard had addressed to Arminius, concerning these nine questions and their opposites, the latter gave his friend the following explanation, in a letter dated the 31st of January, 1606:

1. In answer to the first question, this is the order of the decrees.

(1.) It is my will to save believers.

(2.) On this man I will bestow faith and preserve him in it.

(3.) I will save this man.

For thus does the first of these decrees prescribe, which must necessarily be placed foremost; because, without this, faith is not necessary to salvation, and therefore no

necessity exists to administer the means for faith. But to this is directly opposed the opinion which asserts, that faith is bestowed on him on whom God had previously willed to bestow salvation. For, in this case, it would be his will to save one who did not believe. All that has been said about the difference of the decree and its execution, is futile; as if, in fact, God willed salvation to any one prior to faith, and yet not to bestow salvation on any others than believers. For, beside the consistent agreement of these, [the decree and its execution,] it is certain that God cannot will to bestow that which, on account of his previous decree, He cannot bestow. As therefore faith is, in a general manner, placed before salvation by the first decree; so it must, specially and particularly, be placed before the salvation of this and that man, even in the special decree which has the subsequent execution.

3. To the third question I shall in preference oppose the following: Has God determined peremptorily to act with some men according to the strict rigor of the law, as He did with the fallen angels, and to act with others according to the grace of the Gospel? If they deny this, I have what I wish. But if they affirm it, such a sentiment must be overwhelmed with absurdities; because in such a case God would have acted towards many men with greater severity, than towards the fallen angels, who, as being creatures purely spiritual, each sinned of himself, through his own wickedness without persuasion from any one.

4. They will not be able to deny my fourth opposite question. For remission is promised to those who confess their sins; and the fear is called initial in reference to the filial fear which follows. If they acknowledge it, but say, "Yet God is not induced by them," I will then command them to erase the same word out of their interrogatory, and in a better form to enunciate their own opinion.

5. They will not consider it their duty entirely to deny my

fifth opposing question. If they affirm it, they will declare a falsehood, and will incur the ill opinion of all prudent persons, even of those who are weak. Let them therefore search out what they may place as an intermediate postulate between theirs and mine, and I will then show that it coincides either with their postulate or with mine.

6. I have placed two questions in opposition to the sixth, because their question is also a double one. On the first of them you require no observation. About the second I have said, for the sake of explanation, "that it is a circle, in which nothing is first and nothing last," but in every part of it a beginning and an end are found — which cannot, without absurdity, have place in the decrees of God. I ask, has God determined to bestow salvation on those who believe, or to bestow faith on those who are to be saved? If both of these be asserted, I ask, which of them is the first, and which the last? They will reply, neither; and it is then a circle. If they affirm the latter, that God has determined to bestow faith on those who are to be saved; I will prove, that He has determined to bestow salvation on those who believe, and shall then have formed a circle, notwithstanding their unwillingness. If they adduce the different respect, I will endeavor to confute it; which cannot be a work of much difficulty in so very plain a matter.

7. In the seventh opposite question, I had regard to the expression, is it his duty? for about its possibility there is no contention. But justifying faith is not that by which I believe that my sins are remitted; for thus the same thing will be the object and the effect of justifying faith. By this [justifying faith] I obtain remission of sins, therefore it precedes the other object; [the remission of sins;] and no one can believe that his sins are remitted, unless he knows that he believes by a justifying faith. For this reason, also, no one can believe that his future sins will likewise be remitted, unless he knows that he will believe to the end. For sins are forgiven to him who believes, and only after

they have been committed; wherefore the promise of forgiveness, which is that of the New Testament, must be considered as depending on a condition stipulated by God, that is FAITH, without which there is no covenant.

8. With respect to the eighth Question, let a distinction be made between Faith as it is a quality or habit, and between the same as it is an art. Actual believing justifies, or the act of believing is imputed for righteousness. Because God requires actual faith; for our capability to perform which, He infuses that which is habitual. Therefore, as actual faith does not consist with moral sin, he who falls into mortal sin may be damned. But it is possible for a believer to fall into mortal sin, of which David is seen as an instance Therefore, he may fall at such a moment as, if he were then to die, he would be damned. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." Therefore, if it does condemn us, we have no confidence, we cannot have any; because "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." What is said about the impossibility of this event, because, God has determined not to take such persons out of the world at that moment, conduces nothing in favor of their hypothesis. For this is opposed to final destruction, not to temporary, and to their total destruction for a season, which is the subject of their eighth Question.

9. If it be replied to my ninth opposing Question, that, in the covenant of grace, God requires a duty which is impossible to man; they will be forced to confess, that, in addition to this covenant, another is necessary, according to which God pardons a duty not performed according to that covenant of grace; as it was necessary that there should be another covenant, by which God might pardon a duty not performed according to the legal covenant. And thus shall we proceed on ad infinitum. At length we must arrive at the point from which we can say, God save sinners, of his infinite mercy, which is limited by no conditions prescribed by his equity. This seems to be an expression which will be entirely

conformable to the whole doctrine of those who urge absolute predestination, For, since wrath and mercy are opposed to each other, as wrath is infinite, may not mercy too, be infinite? According to their doctrine, whatever they oppose to the contrary, wrath makes men sinners, that it may have those whom it can punish. But they expressly say, mercy makes men believers by an omnipotent force, and preserves them from the possibility of falling, that it may have those whom it can save. But, as Nicasius Van der Schuer says, if God could make a sinner, that He might have one whom He could punish; He could also punish without sin; therefore He could likewise mercifully save without faith. And as wrath willed to have a just title for damnation, through the intervention of sin, so it became mercy to save, without the intervention of any duty, that it might be manifest that the whole is of mercy without the semblance of justice. I say, without the semblance of justice; because it begets faith by an irresistible force, and by an irresistible force it causes man to continue in faith to the end, and thus necessarily to be saved, according to the decree, "he that believes and perseveres, shall be saved." This being laid down, all equity is excluded, as well from the decree of predestination to salvation, as from that of predestination to death. These objections, I am conscientiously of opinion, may, without calumny, be made to their sentiments; and I am prepared to maintain this very thing against any patron whatsoever of those sentiments. For they do not extricate themselves when they say, that man spontaneously sins, and believes by a spontaneous motion. For that which is spontaneous, and that which is natural, are not in opposition. And that which is spontaneous coincides with that which is absolutely necessary; as, a stone is moved downwards; a beast eats, and propagates its species; man loves that which is good for himself. But all excuses terminate in this spontaneous matter.

### **Discussion Starters**

To answer question 1, Arminius finds it necessary to draw

distinctions. What two kinds of election does he distinguish? Do you think the Gospel is well-served when theologians argue such narrow distinctions?

Arminius' argument against Calvinism here takes the form that if God exercises his sovereignty without giving humans a smidgeon of freedom, then he is indeed the author of sin. Is there any way around this objection? Arminius considers it a perverse argument to say that any individual other than Adam will be condemned for Adam's sin. Why? Do you agree?

Forgiveness follows what, according to Arminius' elaboration of his fourth response to his friend Uytenbogard?

Some Calvinists believe that Jesus died only for those to be saved. This leads to the logical problem of question five—how can a person be condemned for refusing to believe Christ died to save him if indeed Christ did not so die for him? One cannot believe what is in fact not true. Do you agree with Arminius when he says to Uytenbogard that even the [logically] weak would disapprove such a view?

What does Arminius mean in response to question six that certain interpretations are a "circle?" According to Arminius, in what sense is election a gift and in what sense a response by God to a believer's faith?

On what does Arminius consider assurance of salvation to rest?

In answer to question eight, and in his notes to his friend, what role does Arminius say a clear conscience plays in a believer's salvation? How is it demonstrated by confidence or lack of confidence? Can a person have been so confused by inaccurate teaching as to have confidence when actually in sin? Or to lack confidence when actually accepted by God? Does this view of Arminius open some weak-minded Christians to unnecessary fear and dread? Does the Calvinist view make some sinners complacent?

What is the importance of the question whether Christians

can be perfect or not? In what sense does Arminius think that Christians can be perfect?

**Bible verses:**

**Matthew 25:29**

**1 Timothy 1:19**

**1 John 3:21**

**Hebrews 3:14**