

## Three Views on the Mechanics of Salvation

There are three basic views on the mechanics of salvation. They are contrasted in the chart below.

Calvinists believe you can't lose your salvation (if you really have it). Arminians believe you can, by various means.

People who believe in Works Salvation never know if they have it, so they don't worry about losing it. They worry about getting it.

Calvinism	Arminianism	Works Salvation
<p>In strict Calvinism, individual salvation has been entirely pre-determined by the arbitrary choice of God before the foundation of the world. God has chosen who will be saved, how they will be saved and when. He brings a person to salvation "apart from any dignity or indignity" in the individual himself. In other words, a person's choice in the matter, their performance or their worthiness, is irrelevant. His choosing is based on some hidden purpose or pleasure in the mind of God and has nothing to do with man's own will. Those whom God does not choose for salvation are left to the devil to populate hell. They have no choice in that matter either and cannot alter God's eternal decrees by their desire to be saved or their efforts to be saved. A Calvinist friend used to say that "man has no part to play in his own salvation; it is entirely a work of God for man and thus he cannot take any credit for it. We are lucky that God chooses some," he would say, "or all would be lost." Most Calvinists today would say they don't hold to all of the five main points of that theological system, but nevertheless, any one point is bad enough. Here are the five points:</p> <p><b>T</b> = Total Depravity: Man is totally depraved in every aspect of his being (his appetites, mind, emotions, body, etc.) and is basically dead. He cannot respond to God unless God supernaturally regenerates him. Then and only then can he respond to the offer of salvation. Basically he is reborn before he is saved.</p> <p><b>U</b> = Unconditional Election: God chooses men completely apart from any conditions or qualifications in them. He chooses them before they are born and before they have the chance to do anything good or bad, including believe the gospel or respond to God in any way. He does not choose them because He knows they <i>will</i> believe the gospel when they hear it. In fact, if they <i>do</i> believe it, it's because He gave them the faith as a gift, not because they freely chose to believe.</p> <p><b>L</b> = Limited Atonement: Jesus only shed His blood for those individuals whom God previously elected to salvation. He did not die for the sins of all men.</p> <p><b>I</b> = Irresistible Grace: God's choice of you is irresistible. You cannot resist God's will. If He chooses you, you must capitulate and you <i>will</i> go to heaven.</p> <p><b>P</b> = Preservation of the Saints: God keeps those He has chosen and they cannot be lost no matter how they live their lives. His keeping us is a function of His power and proves that He is stronger than Satan.</p> <p>Calvinists base most of their theology on Romans 9 and Ephesians 1. There are easy explanations for both of these chapters. If you listen closely, Calvinists will almost always contradict the basic tenets of their theology. Missions itself is a contradiction of Calvinism. Why spend your life trying to win people to Christ when their destiny has already been predetermined and cannot be altered by anything you (or they) do or don't do? Strict Calvinists believe in absolute sovereignty. God is responsible for everything that happens, including, believe it or not, your sin.</p>	<p>In Arminianism, salvation is a work of God for man, too, but man must respond appropriately. Salvation is not given to those who do not repent. God will not populate heaven with unrepentant, unregenerate sinners, or with robots or puppets. Christ's sacrifice on the cross paid for man's sin (all sin, past, present and future), but that payment is only applied to our personal sins when we repent and live in a repentant relationship with God. We get to heaven by believing (faith) God's revealed truth for our dispensation, and submitting to what He has shown us. We maintain an attitude of faith, and repent when we stumble. This is sometimes called "Lordship salvation." The five points of Arminianism are spelled D-CURE. If Calvinism is the problem, Arminianism is d' Cure. Ha!</p> <p><b>D</b> = Depravity: Man is depraved. Every area of his life is affected by sin, including his body, mind, emotions, will, perceptions, appetites, etc. But he still bears the image of God and is still capable of responding to God when drawn by the Holy Spirit. He is not a corpse. (A corpse cannot respond to God but it cannot sin either.) Though man's spirit is separated from God before salvation, he is a living soul able to make decisions and act on them. He can even do good things and creative things (though they are generally motivated by self-interest).</p> <p><b>C</b> = Conditional Election: Man is chosen on the basis of God's foreknowledge. God knows who will choose to respond appropriately to the light God gives, and those are the ones He elects to save. (Ro.8:29)</p> <p><b>U</b> = Unlimited Atonement: Jesus died for the sins of all men, thus all men have the potential to be saved.</p> <p><b>R</b> = Resistible Grace: God's grace is offered freely to all men, but men can refuse to receive it and thereby fail to avail themselves of God provision for salvation.</p> <p><b>E</b> = Endurance of the Saints: The saints must persevere in their faith through temptation, persecution and various trials by which they are sanctified and made fit for heaven. God assists us in all our difficulties if and as we cling to Him in faith, hope, obedience and repentance.</p> <p>Thus in this theology, man is saved by grace through faith. The grace is God's provision of atonement through the shed blood of Christ. The faith is our own. We must respond to the message of the gospel with humble submission and repentance, believing that we need salvation and cannot save ourselves. It is as we trust in God's provision and continue to walk by the Spirit that we are saved. It is a process that begins at repentance. Jesus said "If you love me you will keep my commandments." He told the "Lord, Lord" people in Matthew 7 that they were lawless and He didn't know them, even though they thought they were saved and had been doing works for Him. They apparently were not living in accord with what they knew to be God's expectations. Sanctification is a process. We all do it imperfectly. But God is there to help us and He forgives us when we stumble. But woe to those who think they can practice sin and live.</p>	<p>In Works Salvation, salvation is based solely on our performance. Our good deeds and bad deeds are put on a scale, and if the good outweigh the bad, we go to heaven. This is the theology behind most of the world's religions, including some "Christian"-like religions. Many formerly Christian denominations no longer espouse the deity of Christ or His atoning work on the cross, and so they have become "social gospel" churches wherein people participate in good works, believing that good works are the ticket to heaven.</p> <p>Unfortunately, if that were the case, we would have a scene something like this at the judgment:</p> <p>God would line up everyone who ever lived, in order of their relative goodness or badness. For example, Mother Teresa would be on the right representing the best humanity had to offer and Hitler would be on the left, representing the worst. Then everyone who ever lived would be lined up between them in order of their goodness. There might be millions of people deep behind each one (all with the same level of goodness), but at some point God will have to come along and divide the line between two individuals, and send all the people on His left to hell, and all those on His right to heaven.</p> <p>As you can see, this is not a workable scheme for judgment. The two people in the middle are only separated by one white lie, or one small omission. It can hardly be just to send one of them to heaven and the other to hell for all eternity. So God had to come up with another plan for judgment, and so He did. A plan that would not require intelligence or wisdom, wealth, health, access to information, nobility, or any other benefit. It would be based purely on the heart's response to the light it was given: in creation, in the conscience, in the Word of God, in direct personal revelation. And it would not require that man atone for his own sin, which is not possible. No amount of good deeds can erase the consequences or pain caused by bad deeds.</p> <p>This is why Christianity is unique among all the world's religions. No other faith-construct provides an adequate substitutionary savior. Other religions have tried to duplicate such a concept, by offering their first born on an altar, or by self-flagellation, or offering flowers and fruit to idols. But nothing but a perfect man could atone for human sin, and nothing but an infinite being could atone for essentially infinite sin. Only God in human form could perform the work of salvation. And only God, by the power of the Holy Spirit in a surrendered life, can bring about sanctification. Sanctification does not happen automatically without our cooperation. We have to participate, submit, fight the good fight of faith. There is an enemy who wants to steal us and kill us, but God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape. That way of escape is Christ Himself through the Holy Spirit. We must call on Him in the day of trouble and He will deliver us.</p>