

Why Are There Differences?

(Today's message shows the causes of doctrinal differences and a brief description of the major theological positions. It concludes by showing that according to the Scriptures there are only two ways of salvation—grace or works.)

Previously, we noticed that while there are differences in the world and that if someone upholds and defends one idea from another it does not necessarily mean he is belligerent, mean-spirited, or hateful. We further stated that our purpose is to teach and build up our faith from a Baptist perspective. The question then may be asked, "Why are there differences among people who profess to be Christian? If we all have the same Bible as our rule of faith and practice why is it that all do not believe alike?" These are valid questions. I believe this can be summarized from quoting from J. P. Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (p. 6) regarding as to the causes of doctrinal variations and why the study of theology will never be "reduced to an exact science." He stated the following:

The causes of doctrinal variation will therefore be apparent.

If men came to the study of Biblical Theology with minds entirely unprejudiced, capable of examining its truths with the same mental powers, and with the same amount of study, all would agree as to its facts and doctrines. But this cannot be done. Mental capacities vary. All men have their prejudices. All have not equal time for study, and all use not equally the time that they have. Thus variety is certain even in studying Biblical Theology.

The same causes increase this in Christian Dogmatics, because here the human element enters more largely than in Biblical Theology; while reverence for antiquity, opposition to change, and the influence of the learned of the past and the present, prevent the alteration of Ecclesiastical creeds which embody Ecclesiastical Dogmatics, and thus lead men constantly to continuance in error, and refusal to accept truth.

In addition to what Boyce stated, when we come to ideas, opinions, and practices of men, we all draw the line somewhere. This is true in areas outside of religion. This is why there are differences in types of education (public, private, home), financial intuitions (checking/savings, credit unions, 401k's, IRA's), businesses (restaurants, groceries, furniture, appliances), politics (which should be obvious at this point), and many other areas. In other words, we all draw the line somewhere. With regard to religion, particularly the Christian religion, there is a standard to which the believer is commanded to bow—the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. This is the standard to which we desire to reference in maintaining the beliefs of Baptists.

While there are many different views of salvation and its associated doctrines and practices among Christians, fundamentally they all fall into one of three buckets: by works, by grace and works, by grace alone. Today theologically they may be classified as Pelagianism, Arminianism, or Calvinism. Using these three different classifications, historically Baptists mainly fall into the class of Calvinism. (Technically, Baptists are not Calvinists in the fullest sense of the word. We hope to enlarge on this more later.) Historically Baptists were mainly in the Calvinist class, especially in America.

Allow me at this point to enlarge somewhat on the three theological camps mentioned above.

To provide a brief description of Pelagianism I will take from the definition as given in *Wikipedia*. "**Pelagianism** is the belief that original sin did not taint human nature and that mortal will is still capable of choosing good or evil without special divine aid. This theological theory is named after the British monk Pelagius (354–420 or 440), although he denied, at least at some point in his life, many of the doctrines associated with his name. Pelagius was identified as an Irishman by ... Jerome. Pelagius taught

that the human will, as created with its abilities by God, was sufficient to live a sinless life, although he believed that God's grace assisted every good work. Pelagianism has come to be identified with the view (whether taught by Pelagius or not) that human beings can earn salvation by their own efforts." This brief definition is very simplistic but it gives a general overview of what is commonly meant by Pelagianism. Therefore, the idea of salvation by works is commonly classified as Pelagianism. (I will add that much of what is commonly believed by those classified as being Arminian comes under the theology of Pelagianism and is called Semipelagianism, but time does not allow me to enlarged on this.)

Again, to borrow from Wikipedia, **Arminianism** is based on theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and his historic supporters known as Remonstrants. ... Jacobus Arminius (Jakob Harmenszoon) was a student of Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor) at the Theological University of Geneva.

Dutch Arminianism was originally articulated in the Remonstrance (1610), a theological statement signed by 45 ministers and submitted to the States General of the Netherlands. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) was called by the States General to consider the Five Articles of Remonstrance. These articles asserted that

1. Salvation (and condemnation on the day of judgment) was conditioned by the graciously-enabled faith (or unbelief) of man;
2. The Atonement is qualitatively adequate for all men, "yet that no one actually enjoys [experiences] this forgiveness of sins, except the believer ..." and thus is limited to only those who trust in Christ;
3. "That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will," and unaided by the Holy Spirit, no person is able to respond to God's will;
4. The (Christian) Grace "of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of any good," yet man may resist the Holy Spirit; and
5. Believers are able to resist sin through Grace, and Christ will keep them from falling; but whether they are beyond the possibility of ultimately forsaking God or ""becoming devoid of grace ... must be more particularly determined from the Scriptures."

As you can see, this semipelagian system with a mixture of works and grace.

Calvinism is essentially the "system that makes the sovereign pleasure of God the ground of His saving purpose." *A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine*, by T. P. Simmons, p. 191. Therefore, salvation by grace alone.

Again I remind you that these are broad views that cover many different ideas and opinions concerning the theology and salvation of man. In reality, the Scriptures teach us that there are only two views or ways that man is saved—by works or by grace—Rom. 11:6, "And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

As you can see from what is presented here today, one of the major foundational principles to be remembered in studying the Holy Scriptures of God and the salvation of man along with all related doctrines is that it is either of works or grace. Since God plainly said that we are saved by grace and not works, then anything that contradicts this grace is not of God. See Eph. 2:8-9. Therefore, man is only accepted by God by grace.