

On many occasions, I have used this space to answer questions someone has posed to me either about the Bible itself or about some matter of doctrine that springs from the Bible. I welcome the questions and invite you to submit them. They challenge me and it is also rewarding to be helpful if I can. *HOWEVER*, some topics are potentially more volatile than others. This forum cannot afford dissenting views "equal time" so I try very hard to be as balanced as possible. I have received notes from people on the mailing list, affirming me for my "irenic" efforts (efforts that pursue peace and common ground). I am sure I have been criticized for not taking a stand even though I have been spared the notes. Such is my disclaimer for a question that often ignites fireworks:

"What do you think of "once saved, always saved"?"

The typical historical position of Restoration Movement churches like ours and the one in which I was raised, allows for the same person who embraces Christ to also reject Him. In other words, I am not a Calvinist, but I am also quite stubborn about disallowing others to frame my arguments with their words. I do not picture people ever "losing" their salvation so much as I allow for the potential that they might willfully and freely "walk away" from it.

Having said that, I have been in solid fellowship for most of my life with many from a Calvinist tradition. What I have learned about them through the years is that they are as abhorred as I am by any hyper-Calvinistic arguments that could lead anyone to conclude that he is safe when he is living a Godless life. While I may see such a person as being at risk of abandoning his salvation, they might see him as not bearing the fruit of repentance and concluding that he may never have really been saved in the first place. (I discovered this in the eighth grade as I argued the matter with the Southern Baptist eighth-grader who eventually became the best man in my wedding.)

I should also add that I am as abhorred as my Calvinist friends by any hyper-free-will argument that depicts God as in any way capricious, much less as a cosmic Sadist Who wants His children groveling in constant dread over their performance, as if they might go one sin too far so that God gives up on them, and the string suspending them over the fires of Hell snaps. That grossly undermines the things that Jesus clearly said about the peace, assurance and security of His Own.

In short, I believe that if a person can walk away from God, it has to be the hardest thing in all of Creation to do, for I suspect that God does all He can do, short of violating human free will, to keep that from happening.

And, round and round such debates go . . . perhaps, a word on doctrine is in order.

Biblical doctrine (Creation, the Fall of man, Atonement in Jesus only, the Deity of Christ, the Imminence of His return, *etc.*) is vital stuff . . . man-made doctrinal systems, not so much. Calvinism and its historical adversary, Armenianism, are mechanisms that help people to put their heads around things that ultimately they will never fathom this side of heaven. Of course, the extreme "hyper-versions" of each inevitably descend into

absurd arguments about bizarre hypothetical scenarios that I have never actually encountered in real life.

I attribute it to the genius of a Father Who knows the tendencies and wiring of each of His children that some prosper in their Christian walk under the tutelage of a system that emphasizes "this" while others benefit more from a system that emphasizes "that." But, I also have learned that everyone prospers when believers learn about one another through fellowship rather than through opposing "doctrinal camps". I am also quite certain that no man-made system will ever provide one single end-all argument to any of the mysteries of God. Of course, that gives me something to look forward to.