

## Calvinism and Arminianism: Is Either Correct?

Both Calvinists and Arminians affirm the fundamentals of the Christian faith. They both acknowledge that man is a sinner, that sin separates him from a holy God, and that he justly deserves eternal punishment in hell. They both agree that God in His mercy sent His son Jesus to die on the cross as a substitute, to pay the penalty for sins men have committed. They agree that salvation is by grace through faith, and that those who do not believe are not saved. But there are significant differences in their views.

The core difference between the two sides is how they answer the question “Why do some receive Christ, while others reject Him?”. The two viewpoints are summarized in the table below:

Viewpoint	Why some receive Christ	Why some reject Christ
Calvinistic	God sovereignly decides to irresistibly bestow on them grace that leads to faith.	God sovereignly decides not to bestow on them grace that leads to faith.
Arminian	They voluntarily believe in response to God's call.	They voluntarily refuse to respond to God's call.

It is my contention in this paper that concerning why some reject Christ, the Arminian position is right. Concerning why some receive Christ, both Calvinists and Arminians are like the blindmen of Hindustan <sup>A</sup> – each is partly in the right, and both are in the wrong.

### The Biblical Process of Salvation

According to the Bible, we are naturally enemies of God (Rom 5:10). Sinners (Rom 3:23). Unrighteous (Rom 3:9). There is nothing good in us (Rom 7:16). We do not seek God (Rom 3:11). Our natural mind is hostile toward God; it does not subject itself to the law of God, and is not even able to do so (Rom 8:7). The cross of Christ seems like foolishness to us (1 Cor 1:18), and we are not even able to understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). We cannot hear God's words (John 8:43). Surely, we are dead in trespasses and sins, without hope, and without God in the world (Eph 2:1, 12).

But God does offer everyone a way out of this hopeless situation. He draws **all** men to to Himself (John 12:32). He makes His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature evident to **all**, so they are without excuse (Rom 1:20). He created us, and He determines our time and place on earth so that we can seek God, and find Him since He is not far from **each one** of us (Acts 17:26-27). He desires **all** men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). He does not wish for **any** to perish, but for **all** to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). He is the savior of [available to] **all** men (1 Tim 4:10). The grace of God has appeared, bringing [a means of] salvation to **all** men (Titus 2:11). The good news of great joy that Christ was born was for **all** the people (Luke 2:10). He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that **all** might believe through him (John 1:7). Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the **whole world** (1 John 2:2). So salvation is offered to all men.

The means God uses to draw men seems to be the conviction of the Spirit. He has sent the Helper to convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). The gospel is effective

when it comes not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Th 1:5).

All are not convicted to the same level. Take Jews and Gentiles as an example. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were “far off” (Eph 2:13), while the Jews had every advantage (Rom 3:1-2). They were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2). To them were given the adoption as sons, the glory and the covenants, the giving of the Law, the temple service, the promises, and the fathers [patriarchs and prophets] (Rom 9:4-5). These are all special revelations that gave the Jews a better understanding of God so that a little conviction should have gone a long way. But even those without these special advantages have the general revelation of creation, and God also uses it to convict. The Gentiles may not have had as much light as the Jews, but God gave them enough light so that they “have no excuse” (Rom 2:1). Now, the roles are reversed. The gospel is preached to every nation, but a partial hardening has happened to Israel (Rom 11:25). In general, Jews are not as open to the gospel as other peoples, since in their culture Jesus is considered a false Christ. God can and does still convict Jews, but there are more barriers that must be broken down for a Jew to become a Christian.

But all are are convicted at some point on some level <sup>B</sup>. When they are convicted, they can respond positively or negatively <sup>C</sup>. A positive response is an acceptance of God's truth. Those that accept it will be granted more truth, until eventually they understand enough to repent of their sins and believe in God, resulting in their salvation. A negative response is a rejection of God's truth. It is resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51), or hardening the heart (Heb 3:7-8). It is dangerous, because there is no guarantee that God will convict again. Felix was convicted as Paul was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. He became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you” (Acts 24:25). But it doesn't appear that a more convenient time ever came, and Felix may have never had another chance to repent.

Those that accept God's truth by believing in Him are granted eternal life (John 3:16). It is not just something they will have after they die, but it is a present reality. In fact, everyone who lives and believes in Him will never die (John 11:26). Every true believer in Jesus is sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 1:13). He seals us and gives us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge (2 Cor 1:22) for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom 8:16-17). Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38-39). We will never perish; and no one will snatch us out of God's hand (John 10:28). Truly, we will not lose our salvation. We are eternally secure.

What we have discussed so far can be summarized in the table below.

<b>State</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Able to Accept God</b>	<b>Able to Reject God</b>
<b>Natural Man</b>	Lost	No	Yes
<b>Convicted Man</b>	Lost	Yes	Yes*
<b>Believing Man</b>	Saved	Yes	No

Man begins in the natural state. He is lost, and unable to accept God in his life. But at some point, God convicts him through the Holy Spirit. While he is in this state, he has a choice <sup>C</sup>. He can accept

God and become a believer, or he can reject God. If he believes, he is saved, and kept by the Spirit so that he never rejects God again. But if a man under conviction rejects God, God may cease convicting him so that he reverts back to his natural state and loses the ability to accept God.

### **Whose Choice Is It Anyway?**

Calvinists may strongly object to my characterization above that man can choose whether to accept or reject God while he is under conviction. As they see it, God is the One who chooses who will accept Him and who will reject Him. They will be quick to point to verses that indicate that those who are saved are chosen by God, and they have a legitimate point. Here are some of the many verses about God's choice.

- Eph 1:4<sup>D</sup> - He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.
- 1 Th 1:4 - Knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.
- 2 Th 2:13 - God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

But we must also consider other verses that indicate men do have a choice, and make decisions regarding whether to accept or reject God's ways.

- Deut 30:19 - I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.
- Psalms 119:30 - I have chosen the faithful way.
- Psalms 119:173 - I have chosen Your precepts.
- Isa 65:12 - You did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.
- Isa 66:3 - They have chosen their own ways.
- Acts 13:46 - It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

So Scripture teaches both that God chooses man and that man chooses God. We must find a way to reconcile the two.

Calvinists don't have a problem harmonizing the two concepts. In their view, God sovereignly decides and then molds the minds of men to match His will. If a man chooses God, it is because God first chose him and has made him want to choose God. Likewise, if a man rejects God it is because God has not chosen him, and has made him want to reject God. God's choice is the basis for man's choice.

Some Calvinists try to prove this point with verses that indicate that God directs man's will. For example:

- Prov 21:1 - The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.
- Phil 2:13 - For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

These verses do clearly establish God can direct man's will. But just because He can and sometimes does direct man's decisions, that doesn't mean He always does. God always gets His wish, but sometimes His good pleasure is to let man make his own decisions. We can see this in the case of

Pharaoh. Sometimes, the Lord hardened his heart (Ex 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:9, 14:8), clearly indicating that God was controlling the decision he would make. But at other times, Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 8:15, 8:32, 9:34), so he must have made the decision on his own. Scripture seems to make a distinction that would not be valid if God always controls the thoughts and intents of man's heart.

If God's choice is not always the basis for man's choice, we are free to reject the Calvinistic view. But that doesn't necessarily mean that we should. We need to consider the possibility that when it comes to the matter of salvation, God does indeed always direct man's will. But I think we can prove that He doesn't. If Calvinism is correct, then some men cannot be saved because they are eternally damned on the basis of God's sovereign decision. But we have already established that salvation is offered to all men. Therefore, Calvinism cannot be correct.

When God's choice is not the basis for man's choice, then it must be the other way around. A choice made by man must be the basis for God's choice. If God convicts a man, and the man chooses to reject the light that God gave him, God may choose to stop convicting him, leaving him in a lost state for all eternity. But God happily accepts those who choose to receive Him, and they become one of God's chosen ones.

There are several passages that tell us at least a little bit about the basis for God's choice. We learn that His choice involves His foreknowledge.

- Rom 8:29 - For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.
- 1 Pet 1:1-2 - Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those ... who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

But what exactly is meant by foreknowledge? Surely God is omniscient, declaring the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10). He knows everything about everyone, even before they are born. But neither of these verses mention anything about facts that He foreknows. Romans 8:29 in particular says that He foreknew individuals. Some Calvinists have latched on to this observation, and claim that to foreknow means to "fore-love". They will point out passages where knowing involves intimate knowledge, such as "Adam knew his wife" (Gen 4:25, KJV), "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them" (John 10:27), and "I never knew you" (Mat 7:23). I agree that passages like these are relevant, and are the key to understanding what foreknowledge is, but I disagree that it means to "fore-love". The way I see it, to know means to have a relationship with. Relationships are always two sided. I don't truly know you, no matter how much time I spend reading your writings or talking to your friends or spying on you, unless you are willing to spend some time with me so we can come to know each other personally. In the same way, God doesn't truly know us unless we are willing to enter a personal relationship with Him. My interpretation of these passages is that God knows beforehand who will, for whatever reason, become willing to enter a personal relationship with Him, and arranges circumstances in their lives such that they will come to a point where they enter into that relationship. So when God chooses according to His foreknowledge, that is not inconsistent with letting man's will be the basis of His choice.

But it may sound presumptuous to say that the basis of our salvation is ultimately our own free choice. Indeed, I think it is presumptuous, and we should not take this Arminian position. Recall why we

rejected Calvinism in the first place. It wasn't because God does not have the power or the right to control our wills. He does do just that from time to time. It was because He will not direct our will to reject Him, since salvation is offered to all. But it is still possible for Him to direct our will to receive Him. In other words, He could convict us irresistibly. That's why there is an asterisk in the table at the end of the previous section. The Spirit may convict a man so strongly that he is unable to reject God and revert back to his natural state. This would not be against God's character; He desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). It is also in line with His choosing according to His foreknowledge, since He knows that those He will direct to choose Him will then be willing to have a personal relationship with Him.

So whose choice is it? There isn't a simple and straightforward answer. Man has a choice, but God influences his choice by how strongly He chooses to convict. In some cases God may convict so strongly that you could say man is compelled; but then he comes to agreement with God, so he is not compelled against his will. I think the best answer is that unbelievers make their own choice, and God allows them to do so. Believers make their own choice as well, but under enough guidance that it can also be said that they are chosen by God.

God has arranged things so that no believer can boast. He cannot say "I am saved because at some level, I chose God with my own free will." He has absolutely no basis to make a claim like that. God is certainly at work in his life to keep him from falling away, and God drew him in the first place, maybe irresistibly. On the other hand, no unbeliever will ever be able to accuse God of not giving him a chance to be saved. He has only himself to blame for not responding to the light God gave him. Truly God is justified when He speaks, and blameless when He judges (Ps 51:4).

### **Can Works Save?**

Scripture is clear that we are not saved by works. There are many passages that say this. For example, Rom 3:20, 27-28, 4:2-6, 9:32, Gal 2:16, 3:2, Eph 2:8-9, 2 Tim 1:9, and Tit 3:5. There is one passage that says "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24), but when we look at the context we see that it indicates that a man must be saved by a genuine faith accompanied by repentance that produces works, as opposed to merely saying "I believe".

But what exactly is a work? Many Calvinists think a work is anything good that man can do. They don't think that man can believe in God before regeneration, but they will argue that if he could, that would be a work. Hence, all of the passages that say we are not saved by works back up the Calvinistic notion that no one can believe unless God has first regenerated him.

A favorite passage for these Calvinists is Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

They claim the phrase "that not of yourselves" refers to faith, indicating that saving faith must be given by God and cannot be of man's free will. But there is no consensus among Greek scholars that this is so. A footnote in the NASB suggests the word "that" refers to "that salvation". Still, the faith that saves must be given by God if man's belief is a work that cannot save.

It's not unreasonable to call faith a work. In fact, Arminians should see support for the idea in passages

like these:

- John 6:28-29 - Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”
- Acts 16:30-31a - And after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I **do** to be saved?” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

But it isn't difficult at all to reconcile these verses with the ones that say we are not saved by works. The answer is simply that faith is a different kind of work than the works that cannot save. Most of the verses (including Ephesians 2:8-9 above) contrast faith and the works that do not save, so it must not be one of them.

So can works save? Yes, if faith is considered a work. But emphatically NO if faith is not considered a work. It is not in the passages that say we are not saved by works, so they do not mean regeneration must precede faith.

### **What About God's Sovereignty?**

The Biblical view of God is that He is sovereign. He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). He does whatever He pleases (Ps 115:3).

Some people will undoubtedly accuse me of limiting God's sovereignty because I maintain that man has free will. I do believe man has free will, but only within limits. God can change our minds at His will so we do as He pleases, but I just don't believe that God always wants to direct our minds. The only thing that I've said that God must do is convict all men and give them a chance to respond positively, since He draws all men. That would be a problem for a sovereign God if He didn't want to do it, but He does want to. He desires all men to be saved <sup>E</sup>.

I admit that if man has any form of free will, that does limit God's sovereignty to some degree in the sense that He no longer has absolute control. I maintain that God is all-powerful, but I think He voluntarily relinquishes some of His control to man. But I don't believe the Scriptures say that God controls absolutely everything. He does whatever He pleases, but there may be some things He just doesn't care about. I don't think He cares whether I decide to wear a blue shirt or a red one.

Maybe a more elaborate example will help to illustrate my point. Consider zoos. They used to be oppressive institutions, with the animals confined in small cages with concrete floors and little sunlight. Today, the animals have larger enclosures outside, with natural habitat. They have more freedom to roam, but they are still confined. Man isn't any less in control. He still has the animals where he wants them to be, and is happy that they have more room.

In the same way, God isn't any less in control if He gives man some freedom. God still maintains the sovereignty to do whatever He pleases, and it doesn't diminish Him one bit.

## Is Compulsion Necessary?

Jesus said in John 6:44:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

What exactly did He mean when He said the Father draws men to Him? Is it an enabling, as in the Father enables men to come to Christ and tugs on heartstrings to encourage them to do so, but leaves the final choice in their hands? Or is it an effectual pull, as in the Father compels the ones He has chosen by forcefully breaking their resistance and actually making them come to Christ? Can anyone come to Jesus unless God compels him?

The Greek word in question which I'll refer to as *helko* is Strong's #1670. It means to drag or draw, literally or figuratively. It is used literally of inanimate objects, such as drawing a sword from its sheath (John 18:10) and drawing in nets full of fish (John 21:6, 11). It is also used literally for dragging Paul into the marketplace (Acts 16:19) and throwing him out of the temple (Acts 21:30). In all of these instances, the word certainly seems to have a forceful character.

It is also used in James 2:6 of rich men that oppress you and drag you before the courts. The word has a forceful character here as well, but it is a different kind of force. The rich don't literally get their hands dirty by dragging you to court. They give you a summons, and force you to come to the courtroom only in the sense that you know things will be worse for you if you don't show up. In that sense, God's call is forceful too. He says "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). What more compelling reason could He give?

But *helko* doesn't always mean to compel. The word is used in the Septuagint in the Song of Solomon where the bride tells her bridegroom "Draw me after you" (1:4). Does she want to be dragged somewhere that she doesn't want to go? No. She wants to willingly follow wherever her beloved leads her. So it seems that *helko* can mean to lead. I think that when God offers to lead the way, some follow willingly.

Still, in each of these instances, the drawing is effectual. The things that are drawn are actually moved. The people who are drawn do actually come. It may be that drawing does imply successful movement even if it doesn't imply forceful movement. That would make sense in John 6:44. Whether compulsion is involved or not, the statement Jesus made holds true. No one can come to Jesus unless the Father leads him. If he is led, he comes, whether he follows of his own free will or he has to be compelled to follow. In the context of John 6, I believe Jesus is referring primarily to a specific drawing that must be effective. The Father effectively draws all that belong to Him to His Son Jesus. The crowd claims to believe in God, but they are on the fence about Jesus. They would accept Him if they truly believed in God. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me" (6:37). The ones the Father gives are the ones that belong to Him because they have accepted Him as their God, not an exclusive group of elite that no one else can hope to join.

I'm hesitant to say that *helko* must be effective though, because John 12:32 is more difficult to explain. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.

If drawing is always effectual, does this verse imply universal salvation?

Calvinists say no. Some of them<sup>F</sup> are fond of saying that “all” can mean “all without distinction”, not “all without exception”, and they would interpret it that way here. In other words, they say all refers to all kinds of people: Jew, Gentile, male, female, rich, poor, young, old, etc. Some from all classes are drawn, but not all individuals.

There is precedent for the word “all” not literally meaning every single individual. A classic example<sup>F</sup> is from Mark 1:5.

And all the country of Judea was going out to him [John the Baptist], and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Obviously, not every single individual in Judea and Jerusalem went out to John and were baptized. Many did, but not every single one, and probably less than a quarter of the population. I'm sure it's true that all kinds of people (i.e. male and female, rich and poor, young and old) came, but does that legitimize Mark's use of the word all? I don't think so. Suppose half the population of Judea lived in Jericho, and none of them came. Then it would still be true that all kinds of people (the way we defined it) came, but I suspect Mark would have added an exception to the verse. He may have written “All the country of Judea was going out to him except the people of Jericho.” Small exceptions can be overlooked, but not large ones. What legitimizes the use of the word all even when referring to a small percentage is that there were no restrictions. John didn't turn people away. All who wanted to went to him and were baptized. So in Mark 1:5, “all” does not mean every one without exception, but it does mean all who desired, without any large exceptions.

The same may be true in John 12:32 as well. If drawing is always effectual, “all” cannot literally mean every one. The Calvinists say those who are not elect are excepted, but that is a large exception indeed. Many travel the broad way, but few the narrow way (Mat 7:13,14). A more reasonable understanding would be that “all” means “all who desire”. “If I am lifted up from the earth, I will lead all who will follow to Myself.” All means all without restriction, not all without distinction, though the all without restriction is also without distinction.

In conclusion, I see no evidence that none can believe without being compelled to do so. The word for drawing can mean to lead willingly rather than to compel. I'm not sure whether it can mean merely to encourage rather than to effectively move, but it doesn't matter. Whether all are drawn meaning all are encouraged to come, or all are drawn meaning all who are willing are led, compulsion is not required.

But just because some come without compulsion, that doesn't mean God never uses it. In the parable of the dinner (Luke 14:16-24), some were invited, but missed out because they refused to come. Others were brought in willingly. Still others were compelled to come. Aren't these groups representative of the way people are or are not saved?

### **What About Romans 9?**

No discussion of Calvinism and Arminianism would be complete without examining Romans 9, since Calvinists often cite it as proof of their persuasion that some are eternally damned from the beginning by God's sovereign will and never have hope of being saved. Let's examine the chapter in detail.



At the start of Romans 9, Paul expresses great sorrow and grief for his kinsmen the Jews. He wishes they would all be saved, but he knows that is not happening. He acknowledges that the Jews have had a special position of privilege as God's chosen people Israel, in accordance with the word of God. He lists some of those privileges in verses 4 and 5. Why is it that despite these privileges, not many Jews are being saved? Has the word of God failed?

Paul says “No”. The reason he gives isn't that the privileges don't lead many to salvation. The reason is that they don't apply to all Jews. The privileges were never guaranteed to all the descendants of Israel, just as they were not guaranteed to all the descendants of Abraham. The promise to Abraham “to be God to you and to your descendants after you” and to “give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:7,8) did not apply to the Ishmaelites, but is fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants. In the same way, the promises were fulfilled through Isaac's younger son Jacob (Israel) rather than through his older son Esau. It was God's decision that it would be this way. It was His “purpose”, His “choice” (v11). He made this choice before the twins were born, before either of them had done anything good or bad (v11). His decision was not based on their works in any way (v11). So He could tell Rebekah ahead of time that there were two nations in her womb (Gen 25:23), and “the older will serve the younger” (Gen 25:23, v12). Paul quotes from Malachi 1:2-3, which was written hundreds of years later, to show that God did indeed carry out the choice He made. “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (v13). This verse is not referring to the individuals themselves, but to the nations they became. God loved Jacob, meaning He made His covenant with the Israelites and gave them all of the privileges. He “hated” Esau in the sense that he did not give the Edomites these advantages. That doesn't mean that Esau himself wasn't given a chance to follow the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac and his brother Jacob. The point is that it wasn't because of Esau's bad works that Edom was not blessed as a nation, and it was because of God's mercy rather than Jacob's good works that Israel was blessed as a nation. And God isn't obligated to continue to bless all of the Jews now because of Jacob, just as He was never obligated to bless the Edomites because of Abraham and Isaac.

Then, lest we think that it is unfair for God to withhold privilege from any, Paul establishes that it is just for God to do so. It is up to Him who He gives special privilege to. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and compassion on whom He will have compassion (v15). But we should not construe this to suggest that God withholds all hope of forgiveness of sins from some. We are still talking about special privilege. Consider where God first made this statement. It is what God said to Moses in Exodus 33:19 after the incident with the golden calf. The people had sinned, and God threatened to depart from them. He says in Exodus 33:3 “I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.” Moses intercedes for the people, and God relents and says “My presence shall go with you” (Ex 33:14), but He lets Moses know that His continued presence is a privilege, not a right. He does have the right to withhold it. So then it does not depend on the man who wills (his thoughts) or the man who runs (his actions), but on God who has mercy (Rom 9:16). In the end, He chose to be merciful to the Israelites even though they did not deserve it.

Pharaoh had many special privileges. He had a front-row seat as God displayed His power in the land of Egypt by the hand of His spokesmen Moses and Aaron. Yet he chose to harden his own heart (Ex 8:15, 8:32, 9:34), and not respond to God. Eventually, God stopped being merciful to him. Though He could have judged Pharaoh by killing with Him with pestilence (Ex 9:15), He decided instead to allow him to remain to demonstrate His power in him, and that His name might be proclaimed

throughout the whole earth. (Ex 9:16, v17). He did this by hardening Pharaoh's heart so he would continue to reject God's word, even after the magicians told him "this is the finger of God" (Ex 8:19). But this does not mean that Pharaoh never had a chance to be saved. He should have turned to God earlier.

It is implied that Pharaoh is held responsible for his sin of not listening to the Lord and obeying Him by letting His people go, even though God hardened his heart so he would continue in this sin. But Paul anticipates that his reader will not think God should hold Pharaoh responsible at all, and will object, saying "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" (v19, NKJV). When the reader says "resist", I don't think that he means to thwart ("who can thwart God's will?"). Rather, he means to defy ("who [being hardened by God] has defied God's will?"). The reader's argument is that if someone sins and God hardens his heart so he continues in the sin, that means that God wanted him to commit the sin in the first place. Therefore, he shouldn't be held responsible for it. But this argument is groundless. God has the right to use a man's stubborn sin to carry out His plan, but He never has to. God could find another way to carry out His plan if the man were obedient. One who is sinning can never say "God should not find fault with me, because I am doing His will." So Paul rebukes the one who would raise this objection strongly. "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" (v20). We never have the right to excuse sin. Doing so is answering back to God, by claiming we know better than He does.

Paul continues to reason with this man who thinks that God has no right to both harden hearts and hold men responsible. He pictures God as a potter, and individuals as vessels that he is forming out of lumps of clay. The potter has the right to form the clay into whatever shape he wants it to take, and hardening hearts is certainly one of the tools available for the potter to use. It is not the place of the vessel to question either the shape he is being formed into or the means the potter uses to form him. But that doesn't mean the potter can't take the vessel's free will into account as he forms him.

Then Paul returns to the topic at hand, to reinforce that Jews are not saved just because they are Jews, but can be lost and in need of salvation. He says that the potter has a right over the clay, to make from the same lump (the Jewish people) both vessels <sup>G</sup> for honorable use (believers who will glorify God) and vessels <sup>G</sup> for common use (unbelievers who will demonstrate God's wrath, and make His power known through their eventual destruction in hell). Verse 23 says that God prepares the vessels of mercy beforehand for glory. He chooses them (as they choose Him), keeps them, and sanctifies them. In verse 22 we see that the vessels of wrath are also prepared for destruction, but it doesn't say God prepares them for that fate beforehand. In fact, it says God endures them with much patience. 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient because He does not wish for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.

God is free to make vessels of mercy out of another lump of clay too, the Gentiles. In fact, the majority of those saved are now Gentiles. It is only a remnant of Israel that will be saved (v27). The Jewish nation as a whole stumbled over Christ, the stumbling stone who causes offense because He said salvation was by faith and not by works (See John 6:27-29 and 61). But to individuals, both Jew and Gentile alike "he who believes in Him will not be disappointed" (v30). So it seems that Romans 9 states once again that salvation is by faith, and does not indicate that faith is withheld from any.

## **Conclusion**

I started this paper with a short summary table of the Calvinistic and Arminian views on why some receive Christ, while others reject Him.

At the start of this paper, I affirmed the Arminian view concerning why some reject Christ. It is because they voluntarily refuse to respond to God's call. I'll finish by stating the view that I've developed in this paper concerning why some receive Christ. It is because they believe in response to God's resistible or irresistible call.

Both Calvinists and Arminians have identified valid reasons for why some receive Christ, but neither are correct when they insist that theirs is the only correct view. God is free to let man choose whether to believe or not, or He can irresistibly cause man to believe. The thing He will not do is withhold a chance to respond from any.

I've tried to limit my arguments to Biblical ones rather than philosophical ones. I hope you will do the same in evaluating this view. Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good (1 Th 5:21).

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## End Notes

<sup>A</sup> See the poem *The Blindmen and the Elephant* by John Godfrey Saxe.  
[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Blindmen\\_and\\_the\\_Elephant](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Blindmen_and_the_Elephant)

<sup>B</sup> Those who never reach an age of accountability may be an exception. I believe they are saved even if they cannot understand who God is and that they are sinners in need of repentance.

<sup>C\*</sup> Although God's conviction may be irresistible in some cases. Read on.

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<sup>E</sup> Of course, 1 Tim 2:4 does not indicate that all are saved, even though God is sovereign and He desires all men to be saved. He desires all men to be saved of their own free will. He could force them to accept Him, or change their minds so they would be willing, but that is evidently not something that He desires to do for all men.

<sup>F</sup> For example, see Chapter 4, section 2, subsection 4 of The Sovereignty of God by A. W. Pink.  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pink/sovereignty.vii.html>

<sup>G</sup> Romans 9:21 actually speaks of one vessel for honorable use and another for common use rather than vessels plural of each category. Some commentators take this to mean that the vessel for common use is unbelieving Israel and the vessel for honorable use is the Godly remnant of Israel. Since the same noun “vessel” is used in the plural form in verses 22 and 23, I think that it must refer to individuals. Using the singular form in verse 21 is consistent with the imagery of a potter, who would shape one vessel at a time.