

**Discipleship:  
An  
Introduction to  
Systematic Theology and  
Apologetics**

**Protestant Reformation Doctrines of Salvation**

**The Heights Church February 17, 2019**

# Reformed vs Arminian Soteriology – Does God Want Everyone to be Saved?

- Two basic facts that both Arminians and the Reformed agree upon:
  1. Every person in the history of the World has not been saved.
  2. The only way a person can be saved is to believe in Jesus.
- In many ways the Arminian view of Soteriology stems from a belief that God does want every person to be saved. Usually Arminians object to the Reformed view, not primarily because of disagreements over Scriptural interpretation, but out of a philosophical moral objection that election is unfair and that God must be absolved of blame for not saving everyone.
- By creating the concept of human autonomy through “Free Will,” God is not unfair because everyone has an equal chance to be saved and God is not responsible for those who choose not to believe or are not told about Jesus.
- Arminians have traditionally grounded their belief in God’s desire to have all people saved on 1 Timothy 2:1 – 4 and 2 Peter 3:9.

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First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all people**, for kings and **all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who **desires all people to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1 – 4)

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward **you**, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.** (2 Peter 3:9)

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- If these verses truly teach that God literally wants each and every person to be saved **BUT** not every person is ultimately saved, then there are at least four possible explanations:
  1. God wants everyone to be saved but lacks the power to accomplish it.
  2. The Bible is self contradictory because it teaches God wants everyone to be saved and teaches that God does not want everyone to be saved.
  3. God wants everyone to be saved in one sense BUT God has a higher priority than saving everyone.
  4. It is incorrect to interpret 1 Timothy 2:1 – 4 and 2 Peter 3:9 as saying that God literally wants each and every person to be saved.

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1. Analysis: God wants everyone to be saved but lacks the power to accomplish it.
  - If this is true then God is not omnipotent and the Bible is not trustworthy because it teaches that God is omnipotent. For example:  
Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Psalm 115:3)
2. Analysis: The Bible is self contradictory because it teaches God wants everyone to be saved and teaches that God does not want everyone to be saved.
  - It has been previously shown that there is a very strong Biblical case for the Reformed view that God sovereignly brings about the salvation of only the elect and that Christ's atonement was only for the elect. Therefore, if it is God's true desire to save everyone, the Bible would not be trustworthy.

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3. Analysis: God wants everyone to be saved in one sense BUT God ultimately has a higher priority.
- Arminians agree with this position and the higher priority is that God has given everyone “Free Will” (ability to choose whether or not to believe in Jesus) and values human freedom of choice above his sovereignty.

Note: The Arminian’s problem is that neither “Free Will\*” nor their belief that God values human autonomy above his sovereignty has any clear, unambiguous NT support.

- The Reformed also believe God has a higher priority, His Glory, and ground their belief in the doctrine of God having two wills.

\* “Free Will” is traditionally understood as the equal ability to choose between two conflicting moral options (**not human autonomy in salvation**). “Free Will” was lost in the Fall but is restored when a person is “born again” (regenerated).

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4. Analysis: It is incorrect to interpret 1 Timothy 2:1 – 4 and 2 Peter 3:9 as saying that God literally wants each and every person to be saved. This is the Reformed view.
  - Therefore, two questions need to be answered to prove the validity of the Reformed view.
    1. How can God have two wills so that in one sense God can legitimately desire everyone to be saved, but actually save only some through the Doctrines of Grace to accomplish his highest priority of maximizing his glory?
    2. What is the correct interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:1 – 4 and 2 Peter 3:9?

# Reformed vs Arminian Soteriology – Does God Want Everyone to be Saved? – The Reformed View of God's Two Wills.

- On one hand God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)
- On the other hand we have previously seen in our study of Systematic Theology that God has two wills. Depending upon the context these two wills may be described by different names. For example:
  1. **Understanding God's will for us:** (Who should we marry, vocational choice and the like.
    - **Revealed Will** (The Bible gives us great freedom with limited boundaries)
    - **Hidden Will** (what God actually causes to happen)



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2. In other cases God's will is spoken of as his moral standards for human behavior and his sovereign control over actions that sometimes contradict his moral standards.
  - Theologians in these contexts may use the term **Moral Will** or **Will of Command** in place of **Revealed Will** and
  - **Will of Decree** or **Sovereign Will** in place of **Hidden Will**.

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- Paul experienced these two contrasting wills:
  - No one was more zealous than Paul to live out the great commission and yet God's Will did not always support his zeal.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Acts 16:6)

because

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9)

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- Paul acknowledged that seemingly good intentions are not always God's will. But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21)

Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:13 – 14)

But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills... (1 Corinthians 4:19)

For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits (1 Corinthians 16:7)

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- Peter also speaks of these two contrasting wills:
  - Revealed/moral/commanded will of God
    - For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (1 Peter 2:15)
    - ...live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:2)
  - Hidden/will of decree/sovereign will of God
    - For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:17)
    - Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. ( 1 Peter 4:19)
    - The point is God may will that a person suffer as a result of hostile sinners or the Fallen world despite adhering to God's Revealed Will.

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- Other NT authors also teach the concept. For example:

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. (Hebrews 6:1 – 3)

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- The ultimate example of the two wills of God is the Crucifixion of Jesus  
Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (Isaiah 53:10)

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:23)

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. (Acts 4:27 -28)

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- God also turned Job over to Satan

And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:12)

And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life." (Job 2:6)

- Does God sin by willing that sinful acts take place?
  - **NO!** ... "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3)

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For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. (Lamentations 3:31 -33)

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (James 1:13)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33 – 36)



## Reformed vs Arminian Soteriology – Does God Want Everyone to be Saved? – The Reformed View of God’s Two Wills.

“It appears that this is Jeremiah’s way of saying that God *does* will the affliction that he causes, but he *does not* will it in the same way he wills compassion... His motivation is complex, and not every true element in it rises to the level of effective choice. In his great and mysterious heart, there are kinds of desires and longings that are real – they tell us something true about his character. Yet not all these longings govern his actions. He is governed by the depth of his wisdom expressed through a plan no ordinary human deliberation would ever conceive.”

Quoted from: [Does God Desire All to Be Saved?](#) by John Piper pages 48 -49