

Glossary of Terms

These are terms that are important to understand Arminian and Calvinist theology. It is helpful for the student to become familiar with these terms and their meaning when studying Wesleyan theology.

Arminian Terms

Arminianism is the teaching regarding salvation associated with the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). The fundamental principle in Arminianism is the rejection of *predestination*, and a corresponding affirmation of the freedom of the human will. Arminianism is often summed up in five articles of doctrine. These were: (1) the divine decree of predestination is conditional, not absolute; (2) the Atonement is intentionally universal; (3) man cannot of himself exercise a saving faith, but requires God's help to attain this faith; (4) though the grace of God is a necessary condition of human effort it does not act irresistibly in man; (5) believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace. Arminians maintain that God gives indispensable help in salvation but ultimately it is the free will of man which decides the issue.

Free will is the ability to make our own choices, including to say “Yes” or “No” to God. Although humanity is fallen, we are not incapacitated by the sinful nature and can freely choose God. Our will is not restricted and enslaved by his sinful nature.

Prevenient Grace is the Holy Spirit at work in everyone between conception and conversion. The Holy Spirit woos us, or prevents us, from moving so far toward disobedience, that when we finally understand the claims of the gospel upon our lives, we are guaranteed the freedom to say yes” (Sanctity Without Starch, Robert Tuttle).

Resistible grace is the ability and freedom to say “No” to God’s offer of salvation. In contrast to Calvinism, God’s grace is not irresistible.

Original sin is a propensity to sin that resulted from the disobedience of Adam and Eve whereby they lost their propensity for righteousness, immortality, and their close personal relationship with God. This became part of the human condition inherited by all subsequent generations (Sanctity Without Starch, Robert Tuttle).

Inbred sin: the traditional view of “inbred sin” came into the mainstream of Christian thought principally through Augustine’s influence and it describes the condition by various terms such as “sinful nature,” “inherited depravity,” “carnal nature,” “adamic corruption,” “inbred sin,” or, simply, “original sin,” etc. This condition, it is held, originated with the sin of Adam and Eve and was passed on to all their descendants with the result that we are all now born in a state of moral depravity.

Christian **Purity** is a state or quality of being. It is the inversion of our sinful moral nature, -- freedom “from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.” It does not consist so much in a repetition of good acts, as in a moral condition of the soul from which all good actions proceed; as depravity, or inbred sin, does not consist so much in vicious acts or habits, as in a state or quality which occasions those acts or habits. (J. A. Wood)

Maturity, which of necessity must be comparative and relative, is applied to an advanced state of all the graces of the new man, involves age, growth, discipline, cultivation and development. Maturity is necessarily gradual, progressive, and indefinite; incomplete in this life, and very likely will be in the world to come. In this respect, the whole Christian life is to be one of progress; there being ample room for growth at every period of its existence, and especially after the heart is cleansed, which perfects the conditions of the most solid, rapid, symmetrical growth. (J. A. Wood)

Holiness: The doctrine of Holiness is grounded in the teaching of John Wesley. The sole design of Methodists, as Wesley put it, is to be “downright Bible-Christians; taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive church [early church fathers] ... for their whole and sole rule.” The primary focus is upon the doctrine of salvation and the relationship between grace, faith, and holiness of heart and life. The life of holiness is revealed through behavior such as sexual purity, financial honesty, and commitment to private prayer.

Christian Perfection is not, and never can be, human perfection. Christian perfection is the perfection of a relationship with God that shows itself to be true even amid the seemingly unimportant aspects of human life. I am called to live in such a perfect relationship with God that my life produces a yearning for God in the lives of others, not admiration for myself. Thoughts about myself hinder my usefulness to God. God’s purpose is not to perfect me to make me a trophy in His showcase; He is getting me to the place where He can use me. Let Him do what He wants. (Oswald Chambers)

Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God’s point of view. It means to secure and to keep all the strength of our body, soul, and spirit for God’s purpose alone. Are we really prepared for God to perform in us everything for which He separated us? And after He has done His work, are we then prepared to separate ourselves to God just as Jesus did? The reason some of us have not entered into the experience of sanctification is that we have not realized the meaning of sanctification from God’s perspective. Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us. Are we really prepared for what that will cost? It will cost absolutely everything in us which is not of God. (Oswald Chambers)

Assurance of Salvation: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” (John Wesley)

Calvinist Terms

Calvinism, also known as reformed theology, is a movement within orthodox Protestantism that was developed by John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian. John Calvin was eight years old when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses but they never met. Calvin was a lawyer who later became a Pastor in Geneva, Switzerland. He produced many commentaries on various books of the Bible, but he is best known for his seminal work known as *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a marvelous work expounding Christian theology, which he published at the age of 26.

Calvinism is best known by five points [T.U.L.I.P.]

1. **Total Depravity:** sin has affected all parts of man. The heart, emotions, will, mind, and body are all affected by sin. We are completely sinful. We cannot seek God or respond to his grace unless He predestines us.
2. **Unconditional Election:** God does not base His election on anything He sees in the individual. He chooses the elect according to the kind intention of His will without any consideration of merit or quality within the individual. Nor does God look into the future to see who would pick Him. Some people are elected to salvation, others are not
3. **Limited Atonement:** Jesus died only for the elect. Though Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient for all, it was not efficacious for all. Jesus only bore the sins of the elect.
4. **Irresistible Grace:** when God elects people to salvation, they cannot resist. God offers to all people the gospel message. This is called the external call. But to the elect, God extends an internal call, and it cannot be resisted. This call is by the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts and minds of the elect to bring them to repentance and regeneration whereby they willingly and freely come to God.
5. **Perseverance of the Saints:** you cannot lose your salvation because the Father has elected, the Son has redeemed, and the Holy Spirit has applied salvation, those thus saved are eternally secure.

Foreknowledge: in his omniscience God knows what the future holds both for individuals and for nations. He knows and sees everything in advance and his will is carried out in accord with his plans and purposes. Foreknowledge is closely connected to election and predestination and to God's sovereign rule of his universe.

The Decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to His will, whereby He has foreordained whatever comes to pass. His Decrees do not negate the responsibility of people for their sins, nor does it mean that God is responsible for sin. But, it necessarily is true that God knows all things actual as well as potential and that which exists exists due to His creative effort. It also follows that God has eternally known all events that have occurred, are occurring and will occur in this [creation](#) including the fall, redemption, glorification, etc. Yet, God is not the one responsible for the sin in the world but has decreed by His permission that it be allowed to exist.

Supralapsarianism and **Infralapsarianism**: the terms “supralapsarianism,” and “infralapsarianism” have to do with the logical order of God's eternal decrees of salvation. The question, basically, is this: did God's decree to save a certain people come before (supra) or after (infra) his decree to permit the fall (laps).

Infralapsarians argue that, in order not to charge God with injustice or sin, it is necessary that God's election of men to salvation be made from a field of men who are sinners already; hence, the decree to ordain the fall must logically come before the decree to elect men to salvation. Otherwise, in ordaining to destruction men who had not yet fallen, the charge could be made against God that he was responsible for their sin and rebellion, which his eternal plan demanded of them.

But no, the supralapsarian responds, God's eternal plan to redeem some and not others from the outset, while requiring sin and the Fall, does not logically make God culpable, and furthermore, it better fits the biblical evidence of God's prerogative to use evil for the accomplishment of his prior designs.

God's ultimate purpose for creation and redemptive history is the triumph of the Lamb both in the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his people; and this plan logically requires the existence of sin, and also of God's triumph over that sin through righteous judgment and sovereign mercy. If God's ultimate purpose in history is the display of his glory in the person and work of Christ; and if the manifold glory of Christ includes righteous wrath against sin; then God's eternal purpose of redemption necessitated the Fall, and did not just respond to it.

Hyper-Calvinism emphasizes the sovereignty of God to such an extent that man's human responsibility is denied. In actuality, Hyper-Calvinism is a rejection of historic Calvinist thought. Hyper-Calvinism denies that the gospel call applies to all, that there is such a thing as "common grace" or that God has any sort of love for the non-elect.

This glossary of Wesleyan theological terms was compiled from various sources by Howard Olver for use with Wesleyan Theology.