



# UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

## How to Read and Interpret the Bible

### FIVE WAYS TO INTERPRET THE BOOK OF REVELATION

#### PRETERIST

1. Time period: THE PAST - Took place in first century A.D. during Roman persecution
2. Prophecy concerned with the persecutions of Christians instituted by the “beast” - Nero or Domitian, continued under Roman Empire, called “Babylon”. Deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

#### HISTORICAL

1. Time period: PAST-FUTURE - From the time of the Roman Empire until the end of the age.
2. An overview of church history from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus. Seen in the symbolism are such events as the barbarian invasions of Rome, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, Islam, etc. Some see the Pope as being the “beast” or “antichrist.”

#### FUTURIST

1. Time period: FUTURE -The future end times
2. The Modern “Left Behind” Type Interpretation. Chapters 6-22 are yet future, and describe literally and symbolically actual people and events yet to appear on the world scene.

#### SPIRITUAL OR IDEALIST

1. Time period: N/A
2. Revelation is a description of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. The book has no historical references or predictive prophecy. Stories to teach spiritual truth.

#### DISPENSATIONAL

1. Two different peoples of God throughout history: Israel and the Church with two different prophetic programs. The seven church letters are seven church ages with 4:1 as the Rapture. The rest of the book deals primarily with the Great Tribulation and the fate of Israel at the hands of the Anti-Christ. The Millennium is viewed as the time that Israel restores everything back to the original.

## ALLEGORICAL

1. A symbolic system in a narrative that allows it to generate a second level of meaning, which develops in tandem with the primary narrative. The symbolic system may refer to myth, a historic figure, an earlier narrative, or an abstract idea. The reader understands early on that interpretive possibilities are limited by this structure.
2. Example: A story in which the characters, settings, and events stand for abstract or moral concepts.
3. Another example: An object or scene that is associated with a certain event or time of year. (Grapes are allegorical of autumn for that is when they are harvested.) This is method used by Catholicism.

---

## CALVINISM AND ARMINIAN THEOLOGY

### CALVINISM

Calvinist theology is sometimes identified with the five points of Calvinism, also called the doctrines of grace, which are a point-by-point response to the five points of the Arminian Remonstrance and which serve as a summation of the judgments rendered by the Synod of Dort in 1619. Calvin himself never used such a model and never combated Arminianism directly. In fact, Calvin died in 1564 and Joseph Arminius was born in 1560, and so the men were not contemporaries. The Articles of Remonstrance were authored by opponents of reformed doctrine and Biblical Monergism. They were rejected in 1619 at the Synod of Dort, more than 50 years after the death of Calvin.

The Synod of Dort (also known as the Synod of Dordt or the Synod of Dordrecht) was a National Synod held in Dordrecht in 1618-1619, by the Dutch Reformed Church, to settle a serious controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of Arminianism.

The five points therefore function as a summary of the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, but not as a complete summation of Calvin's writings or of the theology of the Reformed churches in general. In English, they are sometimes referred to by the acronym TULIP[6] (see below), though this puts them in a different order than the Canons of Dort.

The central assertion of these canons is that God is able to save every person upon whom he has mercy and that his efforts are not frustrated by the unrighteousness or the inability of humans.

### 1. TOTAL DEPRAVITY

- This doctrine, also called "total inability," asserts that as a consequence of the fall of man into sin, every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin. People are not by nature inclined to love God with their whole heart, mind, or strength, but rather all are inclined to serve their own interests over those of their neighbor and to reject the rule of God. Thus, all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because they are unwilling to do so out of the necessity of their own natures. (The term "total" in this context refers to sin affecting every part of a person, not that every person is as evil as possible.)

### 2. UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

- This doctrine asserts that God's choice from eternity of those whom he will bring to himself is not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people. Rather, it is unconditionally

- grounded in God's mercy alone.
- The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination is a doctrine of Calvinism which deals with the question of the control God exercises over the world. In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, God "freely and unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass." The second use of the word "predestination" applies this to the salvation, and refers to the belief that God appointed the eternal destiny of some to salvation by grace, while leaving the remainder to receive eternal damnation for all their sins, even their original sin. The former is called "unconditional election", and the latter "reprobation". In Calvinism, men must be predestined and effectually called (regenerated/born again) unto faith by God before they will even wish to believe or wish to be justified.

### 3. LIMITED ATONEMENT

- Also called "particular redemption" or "definite atonement," this doctrine asserts that Jesus' substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its design and accomplishment. This implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus' death. Calvinists do not believe, however, that the atonement is limited in its value or power (in other words, God could have elected everyone and used it to atone for them all), but rather that the atonement is limited in the sense that it is designed for some and not all. Hence, Calvinists hold that the atonement is sufficient for all and efficient for the elect. The doctrine is driven by the Calvinistic concept of the sovereignty of God in salvation and their understanding of the nature of the atonement.

### 4. IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

- This doctrine, also called "efficacious grace," asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (that is, the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. This means that when God sovereignly purposed to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved. The doctrine holds that every influence of God's Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but that the Holy Spirit, "graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ."

### 5. PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

- Perseverance (or preservation) of the saints (The word
- "saints" is used in the Biblical sense to refer to all who are set apart by God, and not in the technical sense of one who is exceptionally holy, canonized, or in heaven). The doctrine asserts that since God is sovereign and his will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end. Those who apparently fall away either never had true faith to begin with or will return.

## ARMINIANISM

Arminianism is a school of soteriological thought within Protestant Christianity based on the theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and his historic followers, the Remonstrants. The doctrine's acceptance stretches through much of Christianity from the early arguments between Athanasius and Origen, to Augustine of Hippo's defense of "original sin."

Since the sixteenth century, Christians of many sects including the Baptists have been influenced by Arminian views. So have the Methodists; the Congregationalists of the early New England colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the Universalists and Unitarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Arminianism holds to the following tenets:

- Humans are naturally unable to make any effort towards salvation. They possess free will to accept or reject salvation.
- Salvation is possible only by God's grace, which cannot be merited.
- No works of human effort can cause or contribute to salvation - known as predestination.
- God's election is conditional on faith in the sacrifice and Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- Christ's atonement was made on behalf of all people.
- God allows his grace to be resisted by those who freely reject Christ.
- Believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace through persistent, unrepented-of sin.

Arminianism is most accurately used to define those who affirm the original beliefs of Jacobus Arminius himself, but the term can also be understood as an umbrella for a larger grouping of ideas including those of Hugo Grotius, John Wesley and others. There are two primary perspectives on how the system is applied in detail: Classical Arminianism, which sees Arminius as its figurehead, and Wesleyan Arminianism, which sees John Wesley as its figurehead. Wesleyan Arminianism is sometimes synonymous with Methodism. In addition, Arminianism is often misrepresented by some of its critics to include Semipelagianism or even Pelagianism, though proponents of both primary perspectives vehemently deny these claims.

Within the broad scope of the history of Christian theology, Arminianism is closely related to Calvinism (or Reformed theology), and the two systems share both history and many doctrines. Nonetheless, they are often viewed as rivals within evangelicalism because of their disagreement over details of the doctrines of Divine predestination and salvation.

#### 1. DEPRAVITY IS TOTAL

- Arminius states "In this [fallen] state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace."

#### 2. ATONEMENT IS FOR ALL

- Jesus' death was for all people, Jesus draws all people to himself, and all people have opportunity for salvation through faith.

#### 3. JESUS' DEATH SATISFIES GOD'S JUSTICE

- The penalty for the sins of the elect is paid in full through Jesus's work on the cross. Thus Christ's atonement is intended for all, but requires faith to be effected. Arminius states that "Justification, when used for the act of a Judge, is either purely the imputation of righteousness through mercy... or that man is justified before God... according to the rigor of justice without any forgiveness."

#### 4. GRACE IS RESISTIBLE

- God takes initiative in the salvation process and His grace comes to all people. This grace (often called prevenient or pre-regenerating grace) acts on all people to convince them of the Gospel, draw them strongly towards salvation, and enable the possibility of sincere faith. Picirilli states that "indeed this grace is so close to regeneration that it inevitably leads to regeneration unless finally resisted." The offer of salvation through grace does not act irresistibly in a purely cause-

effect, deterministic method but rather in an influence-and-response fashion that can be both freely accepted and freely denied.

#### 5. MAN HAS A FREEWILL TO RESPOND OR RESIST

- Free will is limited by God's sovereignty, but God's sovereignty allows all men the choice to accept the Gospel of Jesus through faith, simultaneously allowing all men to resist.

#### 6. ELECTION IS CONDITIONAL

- Arminius defined election as "the decree of God by which, of Himself, from eternity, He decreed to justify in Christ, believers, and to accept them unto eternal life." God alone determines who will be saved and his determination is that all who believe Jesus through faith will be justified. According to Arminius, "God regards no one in Christ unless they are engrafted in him by faith."

#### 7. GOD PREDETERMINES THE ELECT TO A GLORIOUS FUTURE

- Predestination is not the predetermination of who will believe, but rather the predetermination of the believer's future inheritance. The elect are therefore predestined to sonship through adoption, glorification, and eternal life.

#### 8. ETERNAL SECURITY IS CONDITIONAL

- All believers have full assurance of salvation with the condition that they remain in Christ. Salvation is conditioned on faith, therefore perseverance is also conditioned. Apostasy (turning from Christ) is only committed through a deliberate, willful rejection of Jesus and renouncement of belief.