

John's World...

Did John contradict John in regards to the doctrines of grace? Whose side was he on, after all?

It wasn't just Paul!

There's a real opposition in the evangelical church to what they call "Calvinism", but what Spurgeon called "Bible." Those evangelicals who say they love the prince of preachers are often caused to stop reading him as with horror they recognize he was "one of them."

Most will point to misunderstandings of the apostle Paul as the main culprit in having corrupted the true faith of Jesus. But to be honest, they will also have to point to Augustine, other church fathers, every reformer, the Puritans, Spurgeon, and many others. These distinctive doctrines regarding election have been with us from the beginning. It is the modern church that has turned things around.

And it wasn't just Paul in the Bible, to begin with. Travel with me through the world and works of the apostle John. There is much for an Arminian to love in this man, for sure. At least half a dozen times, the free will of man seems to be John's slam-dunk response to this "Calvinism problem." Case closed.

But I found quite a lot of other words out of John's Gospel and other works, that aren't so favorable to the great theologian on the other side. They seem to indicate, and a few flat-out demand, that God Himself is the great determiner of who is and who is not going to be on the other shore awaiting the redeemed.

If it were a matter of John vs Paul, one might, especially if he were a liberal scholar of the Bible, simply indicate the differences in the two men's personalities and why one *had* to say this or that. That is never a Christian's approach to interpreting Scripture, although that sort of thinking is among us.

But it's not that easy. We're talking about John vs John, and we're forced to harmonize, to interpret one thing John said in the light of something else he said. Most are not willing even to try such a thing, and hence, the denominations form, one group taking its collection of proof texts to its dark little corner, and the other group sneaking off with theirs. The pride of men then creates another church split, and Christ and His church once more are shamed before the ever-watching world.

Thank God for liberty. Thank God that in Him there are no denominations. A man can step back from the battle of men's prideful wills and say, *God* said everything that John wrote. I don't have to be Arminian or Calvinist, Baptist or Presbyterian, free will or elected! I am what God

says I am. I am what Scripture says, and nothing your little group tries to impose on me will work!

So let's take a hard look at the apostle of love, who also happened to give us the final judgment of the human race in the book of Revelation, and was thus the apostle *of judgment* at the same time. Look both of these aspects square in the face of John and His Lord and see the whole picture. And may the denominations crash to the ground now and forever, Amen.

Some will say, hey, get off the fence, Bob!

Such good news I bring you: There is no fence, except the one you created! The fence is in your brain, not in God's Words or Church. I can believe all the Scriptures, every word, and that is what I have chosen to do.

If I were an Arminian

If I were a follower of Jacob Arminius, here is what I would do with the book of John.

But wait, a reader/listener says, I have never consciously followed Arminius, how can you put that title on me? I just love the Lord, and have tried to follow the Scriptures!

Fair enough. But no doubt you followed the Scriptures as they were taught to you in your denomination. Have you studied the issue for yourself? Nevertheless, if this is your plea, allow me mine:

I have never studied John Calvin! Yet I have always been troubled by certain passages of Scripture and wondered why no one around me was troubled, or why they always had such an ineffective interpretation to pass to me. I am the same as you. I grew up in a particular group and Arminian emphasis was passed on down to my thinking, just as Calvinistic emphasis is passed along by Reformed and other groups. You are what you eat for those long years in Sunday School and church.

I am suggesting a mixed and variable diet of Scripture.

When I began studying the Scripture, in perfect freedom from my heritage, just accepting what I saw and heard there, my thought patterns were allowed to change. God's Word does that!

But I was saying, if I were an Arminian, here would be the precious verses I would hang on to, and of course I would simply ignore the troublesome ones, knowing that someday the Lord would enlighten me if it were necessary. But it probably wouldn't be.

I will paraphrase as needed in my quoting of John. Have your Bibles open...

1. John 1:12. Those who *receive* Jesus have the right to become children of God!

Normally the idea of “receiving” Jesus in our culture is considered a work that we initiate. Preacher preaches, gives an invitation, “Who wants to *receive* Jesus?” Our hand goes up (work 1). Who will come forward? We do (work 2). Now pray this prayer with me. We agree (work 3). We “received” Jesus by an act of our will and are therefore the responsible party. We received, we reached out and took Jesus, we now have a right to be a Christian! Then we try real hard to feel something going on. In some cases there is some feeling, in other cases, nothing.

The more Biblical usage of the word is a bit different. Acts 8:17 is one example of the same word, where Samaritan believers had had hands laid on them and they “received the Holy Ghost.” They did nothing. God did everything.

No, this is not the best verse to prove human involvement in initiating salvation.

2. John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2. Jesus, acting as the “Lamb” of God, took away, not only “our” (present hearers/readers of the text, or even that whole generation of Christians) sins, but the sins of the whole world.

Here, I believe is a greater cause for “Calvinist” types to be a bit concerned. Explanations I have read do not tend to be satisfactory, but sound more like defenses. That is never good on either side, to be “defensive.” In the light of other passages I will bring out, these two passages don’t seem to fit.

If God indeed has chosen some (which other John passages will say), how could Jesus have died for every single other soul, knowing they will be paying for their sins in hell?

The answer could be that there really is no way for sin to be paid for by man, no matter the extent or content of the punishment. Always we will fall short.

But then, if the sin is paid for by the blood of Jesus, why is there a Hell, and why would anyone go there?

The answer, most have suggested, has to do with the meaning of the word “world”, which we will quickly meet again, in the following verses. I realize I have not fully responded to these verses, and that is good. I honestly tell you there are problems on both sides. But keep listening, and you will see that the lion’s share of Scriptural evidence is on the ... well, you decide. Ask for the Spirit to guide...

3. John 3:16, 17. Ask anyone their favorite verse. 9 out of 10 will quote this one, or the pair. An Arminian paradise, you say, the safest place in Scripture for the free will of man. God loved the world. (Sorry, but “so” here is not like we use it at all. Not a big deal, but just part of the way we can be misled.) God gave His Son. Believing ones will be saved.

Interpretation by most: God was so much wanting to rescue every individual who ever lived, from Hell, that He sent Jesus to die in their place, knowing that most would refuse this love, but at least some would believe – by their own choice – and be saved.

Questions must follow:

- a. Does “world” mean, indeed, “every individual who ever lived?”
- b. How deal then with “world” in John 3:17: “that the *world* through Him might be saved.” Same *world*. Are we therefore universalists? The same world that God loved is the world that Jesus saved. Can’t have it both ways.

Calvinists say this is the “world” of the redeemed. I tend to look elsewhere for a resolution to the conflict, for I think that is stretching the meaning of “world.” *Kosmos* in the Greek is not so much about individuals as it is about an “orderly arrangement.” A system. The Universe and all its complexities. A complex system of material and people created by God, taken temporarily by Satan, saved from Satan’s grasp and destruction by the victory of Jesus at Calvary.

This, I believe, is the “world” that God loved. His creation. His work. It was, if left in human hands, scheduled to destroy itself. It was on a course of total oblivion and judgment, self-inflicted by sin and its consequences. God devised a plan whereby He could save the world from destruction, bring ownership back to His Son, and allow some people to actually be saved “legally” through the Son taking on the guilt. All others would be rightfully judged.

Then how choose which ones? That, friend, is where grace enters. Amazing grace. Why me? Why you? The only answer is the will of the Father. This concept fits perfectly the other verses we will encounter in John. Don’t take my analysis for it!

By the way, if indeed the word *world* means “everyone”, how will we account for the millions already in Hell when the Savior came?

4. John 7:37-38. 17:30, Revelation 22:17, Let the thirsty come to Me, says Jesus! Here and elsewhere we see Jesus freely inviting all to come to Him for life, for salvation, for forgiveness. Jesus does not behave like a “Calvinist.” Does He not know that some of

these people have been hand-picked, and many others to whom He is talking will not be in Heaven, because God has not chosen them? Why the open invitations?

This is perhaps the most puzzling of all, in the light of passages I will show you later that seem to indicate totally opposite attitudes in Heaven. Yet it was Jesus Himself who said that “many are called, but few are *chosen*.” All have a right to hear, and the Great Commission is still in place. Only lazy and disobedient believers hold back on sharing the Good News because perhaps no one in the audience is among the elect. Jesus models this for us throughout His short life here.

He further shows us that to be chosen is not to be treated any differently by the preacher or soul-winner. God uses the normal means of preaching, teaching, compelling souls, then believing, repenting, that rises from within, is not contrived externally, to bring sinners into the flock. And those who thus receive are the ones whom the Father drew to Himself. I use the very language of Jesus.

Now, if I were a Calvinist...

It is hard for us to grasp the idea that the Father knows all things, from beginning to end. He knows who will be in the final group of Christians. For that group that He knows, He creates a plan whereby they will be conformed to the image of Jesus. That means He is sanctifying us, preparing us, testing us. Those ones for whom a plan is already in place are simply then called out by the preaching of the Gospel. They respond to the call and are made righteous by the blood of Jesus. He finally brings them on into glory. The same group He foreknew. He does it all, from beginning to end.

Sorry, I promised only John. That last paragraph was a paraphrase of Paul in Romans 8:29-30. Perhaps it will help prepare you for the rest of the story, namely, the verses in *John* that very clearly teach election.

1. We start with John 1:13. Those born of God are not born of some human genealogy, not born by trying real hard or doing something, not born because of someone else's effort on our behalf. Birth, we have nothing to do with. Did you assist in your human birth? Neither did you in your spiritual one! You are born of God.
2. The birth theme continues in John 3:3-8. Until we are born, we cannot see the Kingdom, says Jesus. Human flesh brings human flesh into the world, but only God's Spirit can bring Spirit-life into the world. It's like the wind blowing, as far as we are concerned.

Can't tell where it comes from, where it's going. Can't control it. That's how God and rebirth are.

3. John 5:21. The Son gives life to whomever *He wills*. This is explained more in the next passage:
4. John 6:37-. The Father has given to the Son, "X" number of people. Each and every one of those people will come to Jesus! And every one of them will be totally accepted by Jesus! In fact, no one comes to Jesus unless the Father has drawn Him in, unless it has been granted to Him by the Father. Jesus is insistent on this concept in John 6.
5. Perhaps as a footnote to all this, Jesus remarks in 6:70 that He chose the disciples. Yes, that's clear, isn't it? The first members of the Christian church were chosen of God, even the one who would be the betrayer, and lost. Why should later members of the Church be different? Why are we not chosen, elected?
6. John 8:43. The "Jews" did not understand Jesus, because they were not able, says the Lord. No, until God opens the eyes, man is not able to see.
7. John 10:27-29, In the same way, the sheep of Jesus hear His voice. Non-sheep cannot hear Him. They must be tuned in by the Spirit of God. It is in fact the Father Who gives these sheep to Jesus.
8. John 15:19. I chose you out of the world.
9. John 17:2-6. Jesus gives life to as many as the Father gave Him, as above.
10. John 17:9-12. I do not even pray for the world. I pray for the ones you gave me out of the world!

There are more, on both sides, but I believe the case is made, don't you? Not by Calvin or Paul or Augustine, but by the love apostle, who walked closely with Jesus for three years, heard His Voice, loved Him, and rejoiced in His salvation.

My exposition of the Scripture is not perfect, I am sure. Many could go deeper. But many will try to take you down a path which lands you in their denomination for the rest of your life. I have no such aim. Breathe the air of freedom deeply. If anything I have said is troubling, find the passages that show I have erred, and lovingly let me know.

Otherwise, rejoice. If the Word of God is burning in you now and you see something you have not seen before and are rejoicing that God has chosen you, whatever group you happen to inhabit at present, rejoice! That your Name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and will not be blotted out!

Being chosen is a good thing.