

Free Will or Sovereignty: Conflicting Views on Eternal Security

DECEMBER 12, 2016

By Nathan Kennedy, NU Student

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to tease out the issues associated with the debate on eternal security, linking the viewpoints to corresponding understandings of human free moral agency and the sovereignty of God. This paper dives most deeply into the divide between classical Arminianism and classical Calvinism. Because the author is more familiar with Arminian theology, this presentation includes a wider critique of Calvinism but does not fail to turn the mirror of criticism on Arminianism as well. This paper advocates for a theological middle ground, one that grants man legitimate freedoms but does not fail to support the sovereign nature of our God. Advocates from a number of positions around the circle of debate are given entrance into the proverbial ring in order to bring diversity yet clarity to the discussion.

Introduction

The topic of eternal security^[1] is one fraught with no small degree of uncertainty and polarization. It is, as it were, the theological title match of soteriology in which two prizefighters (viz., Calvinism and Arminianism) battle each other for the exclusive rights to the interpretation of the gospel. The roots of this dissertation run deep: They are founded along an epistemological fissure, not merely a singular point of doctrinal preference. On the one hand, Arminians^[2] tout the primacy of man's free moral agency. Antithetically, Calvinists^[3] absolutize the sovereignty of God. In their most distilled constructions, both free will and sovereignty exist to the abatement (and near exclusion) of the other. Because eternal security is a conversation so deeply entrenched in the Calvinist/Arminian debate, it is heavily nuanced. In order to answer whether or not one can lose his salvation, one must understand how (or if) he received it in the first place.

This author comes from a Foursquare Pentecostal background and, as such, is more familiar with and inclined towards Arminianism (free will) than Calvinism (absolute sovereignty). This author's previous experience with a staunchly Calvinist pastor and with misrepresented (and radical) Calvinist teachings has led to jadedness with Calvinism in general. However, strict Arminianism has been presented in a way that has led to legalism and has caused unnecessary fears and doubts about the permanence of salvation. Because of this author's theological location and as a result of study and thorough contemplation, the following presentation will be a demonstration of the need for a middle ground in the polarizing debate between absolute free will and absolute sovereignty.

First, each of the five points of Calvinism will be examined and critiqued in their assertion of absolute sovereignty by both Arminians and moderate Calvinists. The next portion will assess the Arminian view of free will and will logically deconstruct it in order to find a workable compromise with God's sovereignty. Finally, this author will present a hybrid view that embraces aspects of both free will and sovereignty in order to express a relational dynamic in the salvific process and eschatological conclusion. We can have both eternal security and present assurance. We can have both a sovereign God and a free will.

Absolute Sovereignty and the Will of God

But of all the things which happen, the first cause is to be understood to be His will, because He so governs the natures created by Him, as to determine all the counsels and the actions of men to the end decreed by Him.^[4]

Calvin introduces the foundation for the concept of sovereignty by identifying God's interaction with human will. Though there is a certain beauty and grandeur to a view of God inspired by this framework, one would be remiss to discard the painting because it is a shade too dark (errors in our theology rarely occur in black and white, but rather along a spectrum of interpretation). One author uses the story of Bill Yukovich (a prestigious driver who died in a crash caused by a malfunctioning 10-cent catter pin) to illustrate the need for God to be totally sovereign over everything.^[5] Everything that occurs has been ordained by God, and thus everything happens at least by his permission.^[6] However, if this ordination prohibits the human capability for real, high-stakes decision-making, there are alarming implications.

If we cannot view pre-sin-nature Adam as capable of free will, we must attribute the fall to the determination of God. Indeed, God is sovereign, omnipotent, and capable of reconciling even the darkest of deeds^[6], but we must allow marking a larger role in the determination of our failures as well as our successes. God's omniscience and omnipotence must not necessarily include actively fixing every human thought and decision, but rather can imply that his presence to all things at all times includes precise awareness of every human thought and decision. Indeed, nonconformity with the will of God is not the same as escaping his ultimate control, for the former is possible and the latter is not.

Often times, Calvinist thinkers fail to distinguish between the perfect will of God (that which he would have us do) and the actualized will of God (that which we actually do). Because of this, they refute the idea that man's will can prevail over God's, and they struggle with anything less than an actively sovereign God.^[7] However, we have a name for when free humanity violates the perfect will of God: sin. God sovereignly desires that human will live in accordance with his perfect will (that which we find in Scripture and by the work of the Holy Spirit), but we don't always live up to that standard. Are we to say then that God did not will sinlessness? No! Of course, that would be his desire. But since we are presently faced with the problem of sin, we must make a distinction between that will of God which is broken by our sinful actions and that will of God that sovereignly foreknows every human conception and works in them as they happen. We can assert that the two will eschatologically align (for he does have the power to make them one), but that until then, God allows us real choices for the sake of real community. Holding a lesser view of God's sovereignty is not questioning the extent of his power, but is instead questioning the degree to which the limits himself in order to have true relationship with us. Thus, we must allow salvation (for him who accepts it) to be an area of overlap, the "already/not yet," of the perfect and actualized will of God as the will of man is given a voice. Though man's part is limited to a mere receipt or denial of grace, this author holds that the alignment of wills is necessary for the relational dynamic of salvation to be present.

Totally Depraved

Calvinism's first point is a commentary on the fallenness of human nature and an assertion of our inability, outside of Christ, to be anything more than the enemy of God.^[8] This tenet of Calvinism is a response to Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian thought. The first posits that man can achieve moral perfection without God, and the second asserts that mankind makes the first move in the salvific process. This author also denies the validity of these positions.^[9] However, Calvinism takes a right view of depravity and takes it farther than can be properly warranted by a holistic understanding of Scripture. James White writes,

Salvation is surely the free gift of God's grace, but it is a long leap to assume that the nature of the gift indicates the autonomy of the recipient. Life was a gift given to Lazarus, but the giving of the gift did not in any way indicate an ability on the part of the one who received it.^[10]

Calvinism has colored its theology a few shades darker than Calvin ever intended.^[11] Though perhaps not the intent of this first tenet of the synod of Dort, "Total Depravity" now includes an assertion of man's inability to even willfully accept the gift of God's salvation. In contrast to the moderate Calvinist presentation of the life preserver analogy, in which "[l]ike a drowning person, a fallen person can reach out and accept the lifeline even though he cannot make it to safety on his own,"^[12] strict Calvinism seems to view the drowning person as either bound in chains or already dead. It is this extremism that must be addressed.

It would seem as though Calvinist thought exists outside of an understanding of the Old Testament. Any theologian (or even layperson) versed in the OT recognizes the relational dynamic of covenant.^[13] The first covenant between God and the people of Israel included some amount of mutuality. Though God remained ever faithful and quick to forgive, the covenant could not be lived out in fruition if the human party failed to fulfill his/her end of the deal. If we are to recognize salvation as the new covenant, we must allow for at least some overlap between the two, that being relationally and community. We are image-bearers of the divine. We were created for relationship with him. Why, then, should we embrace a doctrine that tells us we have no part in the initiation of covenant? Norm Geisler writes,

... the image of God is not erased in fallen humanity but only effaced... Even fallen human beings have the ability to accept or reject God's gift of salvation. For even though salvation does not come from our will (John 1:13), yet it does come "through [our] faith" (Eph. 2:8) by our act of "receiving" Christ (John 1:12).^[14]

Unconditional Election

This, the second of the five points, asserts that salvation is unconditional both for the Giver (God) and the recipient (man).^[15] This view eliminates the necessity for man to have a positive response to the gospel. It, like each of the five points, is a construct meant to amplify a view of the sovereignty of God. Let us return to the life preserver analogy.^[16] For a Calvinist, God's election is sending Jesus down to the depths of the sea to drag to shore those who have already drowned and are in need of spiritual resuscitation. They are completely and totally dead. This belief is based on the interpretation of passages such as Eph. 2:1-10, which states that we are "dead in sin." The word *dead* here is interpreted to mean that, in sin, they are totally and completely incapable of anything else. They are unable even to seek or accept God unless he and he alone completes the act of regeneration.

How then does a Calvinist view passages like Romans 6? Here, Paul claims we are "dead to sin." If we understand "dead" in the same way as it is applied in Eph. 2, then apparently the regenerated person is utterly and completely incapable of sinning. Obviously, this depiction is a blatant misunderstanding of Scripture. There are many things unsaved people are completely and totally incapable of doing as a result of sin. They are depraved, enslaved, condemned, and alienated. They cannot save themselves, and they are incapable of initiating the relationship with God. God wooed us by sending his Son, and he worked in us in ways we will never know this side of heaven. It is unnecessary, however, to take away man's freedom of choice (as Calvinists seem to do) in order to embrace the sovereignty of God. R. C. Sproul also introduces another analogy in which the unsaved person is likened to either a very sick person who must at least open his mouth to receive medicine (Arminianism) or a dead person who is completely incapable of helping himself at all (Calvinism).^[17] Sproul condemns the former position, claiming it does not line up with the Ephesians passage. Perhaps the opening of one's mouth to the lifesaving cure of salvation is exactly the "through faith" that Paul writes of in Eph. 2:8 – "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith."^[18]

If we acknowledge that Calvinist deity synergism for the sake of preserving God's sovereignty, we can better counter the position. If it is possible for God to remain sovereign and for man to have a place in responding to salvation, it would seem that the dissent on this topic would diminish. Moderates from both camps have submitted that there may be a way, as does this author. The following are models by which we can better understand the extent of God's sovereignty and man's relationship with it.

No person would deny that a driver controls a car simply because he does not manually rotate the wheels, turn each gear, and engage each cylinder. Similarly, God is not weakened by the fact that we are free within the environment in which we have been placed. He will not forcefully micromanage each human thought and action in order for his need to be effected.

The doctor in the "sick person" scenario does not fail to be in control simply because the sick person refuses medicine. Rather, he is limiting himself. If he wanted, he could easily overpower a bedridden and nearly comatose person and force medicine down his throat. It is no question of "can he," but rather, "would he." A patient's cooperation with his doctor does not deprive the doctor of honor, nor does it take away credit. In a further extension of this metaphor, the patient is beset by an unknown, incurable, and terminal disease. The patient knew nothing of this illness before being told by the doctor and can do nothing to prevent its spread and eventual deadly conclusion. The doctor insists himself in order to find a cure. In this view, salvation is submission to go into surgery under anesthesia in order to have life renewed. In this sense, the patient is totally and completely yielded. The cooperation is not in the actualizing of the salvation, but in the deciding to receive it. This scenario once again takes no credit away from the doctor, who took on sickness and death in order to find the cure. Rather, it glorifies One who sacrifices for the sake of relationship. A final depiction is presented by Norm Geisler: "The act of receiving is no more meritorious than it is to give credit to a beggar for taking a handout."^[19] Indeed, our God takes on everything, even the risk of rejection, as he offers new life to those whom he loves.

Limited Atonement

The third point of Calvinism is the logical outflowing of the previous points, but is simultaneously the logical antithesis to every other point. If indeed man is completely uninvolved in the process of salvation (as the first two points would have us believe) then God is entirely responsible for all those who are saved. However, not all are saved. Logically, then, Christ's atonement was never meant to be universal, but was meant to apply only to those whom God had predetermined and predestined for salvation.^[20] This would indicate that God has also predestined some for eternal damnation. The problems with this point are manifold.

The first issue is an internal one. Limited atonement is a denial of God's absolute sovereignty. When confronted on the issue of limited atonement, a good Calvinist will say, "It's not that God can't save everyone, it's that he doesn't, and we will never know why. He is gracious for saving any, so let's be thankful for what we can get." This is the same thing Arminians and Catholics have been saying all along. God is still entirely sovereign, even when he restricts himself. Why then can he not limit himself in his dealings with humanity? Why can we not view God as capable of decreeing, destiny, and determining, but limiting himself to simply foreknowing? When the logical end of an argument is also its logical undoing, the argument is on thin ice indeed.

This tenet also arms those who see God as impotent, malignant, or aloof. They think that God isn't really able to save, that he really doesn't want to save, or that the stakes are low in this cosmic game that fails to engage his interest. Atonement is indeed limited, but that limitation is because of the unyieldedness of human wills. It is limited not in extent or intent,^[21] but rather in result or application.^[21] Christ died for all, but his propitiation is only effective for those who work with God by accepting his gift. In Chosen but Free, Geisler demonstrates that saving faith is available to all, not just the elect.^[22] He provides a wonderful illustration of Calvinist thought by rephrasing John 3:16: "God so loved his elect through the world that he gave his Son with this intention, that by his believers might be saved."^[23] He also points out that, though the term *elect* is a fairly commonly employed part of New Testament vocabulary, it is never once used to assert that Christ's atonement was limited in intent.^[24] Indeed, Christ died "for the world," and "for the ungodly."^[25] In addition to the many difficulties found in this point, it raises the logical possibility that a person intent on seeking God could live his entire life with a false assurance of salvation. It is for this reason that, although Calvinists have eternal security, they lack present assurance because they are unable to discern what it takes to be "the elect." The simple equation of *universal atonement* available to all who believe is more in line with the gospel narrative and allows for less-complicated evangelism.

Irresistible Grace

Norman Geisler makes a distinction between the moderate and strict Calvinist views on irresistible grace, describing the former as a "persuasive" grace and the latter as a "coercive" grace.^[26] This point is heavily nuanced and depends wholly on the nature of "the elect."^[26] Strict Calvinists view the elect as sinners whom God has chosen to raise to life and to whom God has decided to apply all the benefits of Christ's atonement.^[27] Moderates believe that the grace of God is relentless and persuasive, but that is only effective for those who are willing to receive it.^[28] Once again, we run into logical issues when we try to incorporate this point into the whole picture of Calvinism.

If, as Calvinists would have us believe, God's grace brings to salvation even those who are unwilling and uninvolved in the process of receiving it, then the logical end of this point would be universalism (grace is even given to those who never encounter the gospel). We are left feeling uneasy as we try to contemplate the motives of a God who, uninhibited by any force (even the unwillingness of man), still applies Christ's atonement to a select few. In an attempt to set up for a persuasive argument for eternal security that is rooted in the sovereignty of God, Calvinists have taken every last ounce of human participation out of the mix. It is an understandable misstep, for error lies only with man and not with God, and thus any human participation in the bestowal of salvation could adversely affect its permanence. If God can deflect whatsoever he desires despite the will of man, that means that God's desires cannot be impeded by the sinful will of man. Thus, we can not attribute the eternal damnation of the reprobate to the desire of God. Stated another way, the ungodly go to hell because God wanted them to. We serve a God who apparently is willing that many should perish.

We must allow the unwillingness of man to be that which leads to perdition. Though any Calvinist would deny its occurrence, it is logically possible (i.e., within the Calvinist schema) for an unwilling recipient of grace to inherit eternal life while a person positively disinclined to the gospel is excluded from the eternal community of the elect. God's grace is not forceful and demanding. Yes, God is the potter and we are the clay.^[29] but he did not create us for the express purpose of molding pots. We are living clay, imbued with the touch and image of our maker. This is a much more intimate relationship than that of a potter to his clay, for we were made to bring him glory as we enter into covenant relationship with him. We were created to walk with him, to experience community with him, and to spend eternity with him. His kindness leads us to repentance, as we experience the love that was poured out for us by Christ's sacrifice. His grace is unfathomable, inescapable, persistent, and genuine. However, as is truly the greatest tragedy of sin, his grace can be rejected.^[30] Because of the sinful desires of human hearts, many will consider autonomy to be of greater value than submission. They will consider isolation as preferable to community. Moreover, God, whose mission is to reconcile that one lost sheep, is genuinely heartbroken as he sees his beloved creations, his children, turn away from that which is unconditionally given. This is the sin that leads to death: to deny the grace of God.

Perseverance of the Saints

White provides a clarifying distinction: "Perseverance of the Saints—that all the truly regenerated are kept by the power of God into ultimate salvation."^[31] This final point is the culmination of the previous four and is of utmost importance for this work. Though this author has vehemently disagreed with many aspects of Calvinism, it is granted here that, at least in principle, this tenet is essential to a life walked out in grace rather than in fear. This point is also logically consistent with the previous four. If God is indeed sovereign and does not allow marking any role in accepting or receiving the gift of salvation, then mankind would also be unable to do anything to prevent God from securing the permanence of the salvation.^[32]

There are, however, some issues with the Calvinist model.^[33] The primary problem is found as one follows a logical flow. If one must remain faithful to the end in order to be eternally secure, then he is not elect (and eternal security was not his after all) if he falls into sin at the time of his death or at the time of the rapture. Because both death and rapture are unpredictable and could potentially take place at any time, then one can only have eternal security if he is faithful *at all times*. This is true, then no person who falls into sin is truly elect. What, then, is said to the churchgoer who repents of an affair? (Well, you weren't faithful to the end, so you can go ahead and do your thing. You are not one of God's elect.") Surely this explanation denies the ability of Christ's death to atone for sin once and for all. No, truly, we must make a distinction between faith and faithfulness. The latter requires persistence in moral perfection, but the former requires dependence on the grace of God who continues to sustain, love, and forgive in the midst of sin.

Absolute Freedom and the Will of Man

The Arminian view of eternal security can be summarized as follows: *If I can get myself in, I can get myself out.* This viewpoint is founded on an understanding of the primacy of the will of man. Arminians tend to share the topic too darkly. One advantage of a high view of free will is found in the interpretation of the fall. Here, we are able to assert that God made humans in his likeness and that, as a part of that likeness, he gave us the ability to choose. When Adam sinned, the image of God in man was marred, but the ability to choose remained. That is the purpose of the forbidden tree, is it not? Before eating of its fruit, every choice was based in trust and obedience: in complete and total submission. Afterwards, choice stemmed from the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. This differentiation is devoid of importance if it fails to culminate in decision. The fall occurred because man's will could allow him to do things that God's perfect will would not permit. The result of man's saying, "I want control," and in that control, receiving ownership of an un-payable debt. In the atonement, God says, "You were made for me. Come back to me. Submit to me. Let me love you. I can fix this." Overcome by his persistent grace, man is brought to restoration as he yields his will to God's.

There are limits to the will of man, as many (even strict) Arminians will admit. A Reformed Arminian author writes, "A fly view of depravity is that the will is bound by sin until it is drawn, enabled, and excited by grace."^[34] This is because Arminians, as well as Calvinists, refute Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian thought. It is these postulates that deny the true depravity of man, which every Arminian holds to some degree. Semi-Pelagianism claims that man is capable of acting first, that fallen man is able to, uninfluenced by grace, desire God wholeheartedly. This author and Arminians everywhere cringe at this extreme presentation of the free will of man. Semi-Pelagianism would have us think the drowning person is actually not in much peril at all. Indeed, God, in Christ, acted first. He wooed and pursued us. This is a necessary limitation of the will of man. Our will is not unconditional. God can, has, does, and will influence our decisions. We must indeed respond to his grace if it is to be efficacious, but the fact that it is a response signifies that our decision has been conditioned. Similarly, our Christian lives are the playing out of decisions conditioned by his love and by our desire to respond in kind.

Another limitation to free will is that it is not absolute. If this is true, humans can simply opt out of salvation at any time. Geisler writes,

Arminians contend that if we can exercise faith to "get in" Christ then we can use the same faith to "get out" of Christ. Just like getting on and off a bus headed for heaven, we can exercise our free choice at either end. Not to be able to do this, they insist, would mean that once we get saved, then we are no longer free. Freedom is symmetrical; if you have the freedom to get saved, then you have the freedom to get lost again.^[35]

He follows this argument with its logical conclusion: If our freedom means we can get lost again and we retain freedom in heaven, we can become lost even after we get to heaven.^[36] This is, of course, preposterous. In our assertion of freedom, we must take care to retain a stalwart view of God's sovereignty. We must not be so flippant as to think we can toy with the transformative gift that he bestows. Indeed, the only choice that absolutely leads to damnation is the decision to reject Christ's atonement, and this is not a decision that a genuine believer is capable of making.

The final major flaw in the Arminian understanding of salvation and free will comes from a breakdown in the most ubiquitous model of salvation found in this paper and elsewhere: salvation as a gift. Arminians have become so mentally saturated with this notion that it is the only model that makes sense. They have built the entire framework of their understanding around this model. But salvation is so much more transformative than a simple gift. It is new life, new birth. It is the radical regeneration of old to new. It is becoming dead to sin and alive in Christ.^[37] In his critique of Arminianism, a moderate Calvinist author points out that some decisions (such as suicide), though enacted through free will, cannot be undone.^[38] A gift can be both accepted and returned voluntarily, but the decision to take on a new nature cannot be undone. Similarly, one who is born again cannot become unborn: He cannot reenter the womb of unregenerate and unatoned sinfulness. The New Testament is a powerful testimony to the fact that we have been made new. It also tells us that, though we have a new nature, we will sometimes act in ways contrary to it. This is the struggle of which Paul speaks in Romans 7:

So I find this law at work in me, when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!^[39]

Indeed, this is the tension of our Christian walk. We have been made new—eikons restored by God's grace through Christ's atoning sacrifice. We are not to live in constant fear that our sin will tear us away from the promise of God. Rather, we must daily depend on his grace and mercy to sustain us, as we engage the very real struggle of denying our old master and following the new. We can have eternal security, despite the fact that we still sin—and like it. Security is ours because our salvation is given by a God who reconciles our failures and walks with us in our sin, pursuing and persuading us with his grace. Our salvation hangs not upon our works but upon the cross. It is in him who died to bring us back into community and relationship with God. As is always the case in true community, we must examine the heart (not just the actions) in order to assess the health of the relationship, for a right heart reads of authenticity.

A Hybrid Moderate View

Salvation is that which differentiates Christians from the world. It is the starting point in our relationship with God. It is of utmost importance to us, and as such, we cannot allow ourselves to live our lives questioning our status in God's eyes. Salvation is not a guessing game. We can believe that God will bring to completion the work he began in us, but in that belief, we must acknowledge that, at times, we will still sin—and like it. However, if our heart is right, "[a]lthough apostasy is a fearful and real evil... the man who trusts in God and seeks after godliness will find that God is able and willing to keep him for His heavenly kingdom."^[40] We serve a God who is faithful when we are not, who forgives his children that come before him in repentance. We can trust that God has provided a salvation that is sufficient for all and is sufficient for those who believe and confess. Though our hopes are only realized eschatologically, we can have both present assurance and eternal security.

This discussion has so often included "what if" questions that have no bearing on day-to-day living. Arminians seem to be particularly guilty of this type of self-questioning: "What if I do this? What if I think this? Will I lose salvation if —?" It is at this juncture that we must remember the purpose of theology. It is for us to understand God and our relationship with him better in order that we may live out our walk more effectively. The central, philosophical questions in this debate prove especially thorny: "Can a person of genuine faith backslide so far that he no longer wants salvation and spends the rest of his life defaming the Lord?" So, does this person lose his salvation? Maybe. But what does that have to do with real Christian living? In our attempt to understand the unrevealed aspects of the mind of God, we are asking the wrong questions. The point of this discussion ought not be the analysis of the theoretical but of the practical. This author can assert with confidence that no Christian whose heart yearns after God will ever have salvation torn away. Moreover, what does genuine, authentic, heartfelt faith even look like?

A Northwest University professor said recently, "If you are the type of person who is worried about losing your salvation, you have no reason to be worried about losing your salvation." True faith is an issue of the heart. However, there are many (especially within Arminian circles) who are needlessly worrying about their status in eternity. Strict Arminianism has led them to, on some level, believe their salvation stands upon the edge of a knife: stay, but a little and it will fall, to the ruin of all.^[41] John MacArthur's book, *Saved Without a Doubt*, is tremendously helpful in laying out a foundation for both present assurance and eternal security. He provides 11 tests that give the genuine believer faith in the promise of salvation.^[42] These tests are posed in question form:

1. Have you enjoyed fellowship with Christ and the Father?
2. Are you sensitive to sin?
3. Do you obey God's Word?
4. Do you reject this evil world?
5. Do you eagerly await Christ's return?
6. Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life?
7. Do you love other Christians?
8. Do you experience answered prayer?
9. Do you experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
10. Can you discern between spiritual truth and error?
11. Have you suffered rejection because of your faith?

Though this list is by no means meant to be exhaustive or to be perfectly inspired as the Word of God, it functions as a guideline that puts our perspective on the purposes and desires of the heart and the vitality of faith. We are a goal-oriented race. Oftentimes, our desire to live as we ought is not for the joy of experiencing the Lord and his work in our lives, but is instead done to make sure we are being "good enough" to cash in on the ultimate goal: heaven. When we reprioritize our hearts and earnestly seek his face to serve, love, and obey him, we have no need to be worried about whether we are good enough, for in the intimacy of his presence, his love is made known. The above list is not a chart of pharisaic rules that must be followed to the letter; it is a mirror of the heart. We will be known by our fruit,^[43] and the vitality of our faith will be known by our works.^[44]

Total sovereignty destroys the relational aspect of the covenant into which we enter as we accept God's gift of salvation and transformative, new work in us. It gives us certainty that the truly elect will attain eternal security, but at the expense of robbing man of his participation in the program of God's mission here on earth. It grants eternal security, but leaves the believer with no guarantee that God's grace was ever meant for him (for indeed, Calvinism teaches that there are many for whose sin Christ did not pay). Total free will logically leads to the ability to, at any time, opt out of God's gift. It leads to the necessity for repentance after every sin lest God tear away his gift. It leads to complete lack of security in Christ's work, thus undermining God's sovereignty. In its attempt to give man a greater role in the divine drama, Arminianism has reached the conclusion that man can spoil even the most perfect gift. We must allow for some degree of backsliding or continuing to succumb to the allure of the sin nature without thinking that this allure is equivalent with forfeiture of salvation.

Our adjudication may not be precise (and it must not be allowed to