

Five Facts About Arminius the Man, and Not the Theology Debate

Jacobus Arminius was born either in 1559 or 1560 in Oudewater, Holland and died about 50 years later. During that half a century he lived a fascinating life in a lot of ways, yet it seems the only thing many people associate him with centuries after his death is a systematic theology argument. The 16th and 17th centuries were a time of significant theological and denominational divisions in Christianity and Arminius's teachings were so impactful that he gathered a fierce, loyal following in his day. And people continue to adhere to and teach them in our day.

I have written about Arminianism many times for this site and you can see those articles below. Today, though, I want to remind everyone who reads REO that Arminius was a human soul, not a mere set of beliefs. I'm sure he experienced pain and disappointment. I'm sure he experienced joy. I'm sure he felt compassion for people. His sermons on Romans 7 and Romans 9 have been well known from his time until ours. But by comparison very little is known about his character and personality.

So today I submit five things about Arminius the man, that have little to nothing to do with his teachings on Christian salvation:

1. After the bubonic plague invaded Amsterdam in 1601 and claimed 20,000 victims, Arminius took water into homes of the sick that no one else would enter[1. Robert Picirilli, *Grace,*

Faith, Free Will, 8].

I believe the willingness of a Christian to get their hands dirty serving people who are in desperate need is a significant mark of a disciple of Christ. Arminius, at least at this time in his life, was this kind of disciple. I find this convicting.

2. His father died when he was an infant. When he was about 15 and a newly registered student at Marburg University in Germany, his mother and brothers were all killed when Spaniards burned his hometown[2. Gerald McCulloh, *Man's Faith and Freedom; the Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius*, 12].

Growing up fatherless (in a strict sense, note that he did have male mentors as Theodorus Aemilius and Rudolph Snellius) and losing all of his immediate family when he was a teenager had to be a tough blow. But he did not let it derail his education and got a degree from the University of Leiden.

3. He strongly complimented and encouraged people to read John Calvin's commentaries[3. Mark A. Ellis, Introduction to *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, vii.].

Arminius was a mere five years old when Calvin died, so the two men were not true contemporaries. In fact, Arminius's chief theological rival was Fransiscus Gomarus, a Calvinist and fellow faculty member when Arminius went back to teach at Leiden. It was Gomarus who opposed Arminius's teachings and not the other way around. My understanding, especially noted in the bolded statement above, is that Arminius was not a vicious debater and respected those whose interpretations differed from his. But anyone who teaches the Bible stands to receive opposition. Arminius often did throughout his life.

It was Arminius's followers after his death who facilitated a bigger divide between the teachings of Calvin and Arminius, notably in their publications the year after he died and later in 1621. It is a divide that exists to this day. I do not necessarily fault them for staking claim to key theological ground; my point is that Arminius was not a fire-breathing, Calvin-bashing preacher. He wrote in 1607:

"I encourage the reading of the commentaries of Calvin, which I extol with the greatest praise...For I say that he is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture, and his comments are better than anything which the Fathers give us."[4. Jacobus Arminius to Sebastian Egbert, 3 May, 1607, Christiaan Hartsocker and Philippus van Limborch, eds., 236-37; cited by Ellis, vii.]

4. He had a wife and nine children, though very little is written about them[5. Kasper Brant, *The Life of James Arminius*, 38, 299.].

His wife's name was Lijsbet Reael, who was from an affluent Amsterdam family, and they were married in 1590. He lost two children in infancy but eventually were blessed with seven sons and two daughters by the early 1600s. Beyond this, very little is mentioned about his family in the works I have read. I find it humanizing, however, that this man who taught things so significant that people bear his name on their theological system over 400 years after his death, dealt with the trivial, menial, daily aspects of marriage and parenting. And with the horrifying tragedy of losing children to death.

5. He drew big crowds whenever he preached[6. Donald M. Lake, *Jacobus Arminius' Contribution to a Theology of Grace*, Grace

Unlimited, ed. Charles H. Pinnock, 226; cited by Picirilli, 6].

Arminius was a pastor, preacher and a professor. My experience tells me it is hard to be exceptional at all three. Yet by all accounts, it appears he was. The time and culture he lived in were different than mine, but I wonder if it wasn't as prevalent back then that educated young pastors often preached from ivory towers where common parishioners either could not understand or were turned off by it. Either way, it is encouraging to me that Arminius knew how to preach well enough to reach a lot of people. Preaching should neither be boring or prudish.

Perhaps one day I will do a similar list for John Calvin. In the meantime, I encourage us all to see people as people and not merely as a set of beliefs or opinions, though those can matter. Our humanity demands treating other people like humans. Just as Arminius did.

Calvinist Constantly Using Romans 9 Argument Stunned to Read Verses 30-33

Local Calvinist Ezekiel Owens, after years of pulling out

Romans 9 as his invincible weapon in discussions with Arminians, was taken aback today to read the last few verses of the chapter, according to sources.

“Yeah, for years he would get in lengthy discussions about what ‘all’ means in the Bible, but he always knew that if they got bogged down in details that he had a theological bazooka in his hip pocket,” confirmed his neighbor and aunt, Alice. “He was always going on about ‘God has mercy on whom he desires and hardens whom he desires. Who are you to question how or why God saves people?’ Bam! Gun to a knife fight. Now that he’s read Paul clarify by saying God has mercy and hardens based on whoever puts their faith in him, he seems lost. There’s even talk of him looking on Amazon for Arminius’ three-volume work. It’s that serious.”

Ezekiel’s old college roommate and unabashed Arminian, Joel, added, “I’ve been trying for years to use Romans 10:9 and the obvious choice of ‘if you confess’ to convince him of free will in salvation, but apparently he could not be convinced from chapter 10. Had to be 9.”

There have also been rumors of Ezekiel shaving his beard, but as of this writing those rumors are unconfirmed.

A Book Review: Free Will Revisited

I tend to talk about Dr. Robert Picirilli in sycophantic

tones. I suppose it is hard not to come across that way even though I am sincere in my praise of him and his influence in my life. I actually had him as a professor at a small school with intimate classes. Beyond that, he has been humble enough to answer my emails about Greek long after I graduated. And then there's his published works, which have a special place on my bookshelves.

I've read all of his works at least once, and *Grace, Faith, Free Will* at least 20 times—mostly because it takes many, many readings for a man like me to absorb the fire hydrant of material. And even then I do not think I understand it all. Anytime I feel like I'm getting a little too proud of my intelligence, one chapter of that book will bring me down a notch.

So it was with great joy my Senior Pastor told me not to buy Dr. Picirilli's new book, *Free Will Revisited*, because he already had a copy for me. And despite it being a slim 135 pages, it still took me days to get through it. Because this treatment of a crucial difference between two major branches of orthodox Christianity cannot be discussed simplistically. The reasoning gets into deep waters at times. I will be rereading.

I want to say up front that yet again, just as with *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, Picirilli goes to admirable lengths to make sure he presents his opponents views accurately and fairly. Like a champ, he takes on three of the heaviest weights of the last 500 years of church history in Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. And he spends probably 35-40% of the book trying to express their views in their own words. There are no straw men being batted down. In stark contrast to the Social Media Debate Generation, Picirilli reads to understand, articulates the other position, and does not jump quickly to his responses. And by all means note the subtitle of this book is a "respectful" response to Luther, Calvin, and Edwards. I implore all of us to take a note from Picirilli's

format and approach. Listen or read carefully. Do not misrepresent your opponent's views. Be humble and respectful.

As far as the content itself, there are times where Picirilli makes a more simple and straightforward argument against the writings of these three men opposing human free will. As when he notes that it is very difficult to get around teaching that God coerces us if we believe our will is completely against God prior to salvation and that God by his grace changes our will to His. Yet there are other times Picirilli shows how complex the debate can get, as on pages 86-87 when he talks about how things that are certain are not "necessary" and how God's knowledge of the future is like our knowledge of the past. He dealt with this in the early part of *Grace, Faith, Free Will* but I believe Picirilli to be a very self-aware man, knowing that many of his readers would have read that volume and in my opinion avoids rehashing that part of his previous book but instead explains it with a fresh perspective.

[In the past I have written for REO on Arminius's own words and how much overlap there is to Calvinism and Arminianism.](#) I did so based on what my professors, like Picirilli, have taught me. Here again, he accomplishes the same goal. He does not cite Arminius yet he still makes the point plainly and necessarily that Arminians believe that man is totally depraved, that God draws us to Himself by grace, that man does zero to contribute to his salvation in a way that could be called "works" and that God is completely sovereign over all creation, including human will. The difference lies, in large part, on the focus of the book. Do Christians accept salvation like a drowning man who realizes he cannot swim and chooses to take a rope to save him or are they saved completely void of any free, self-determined choice?

Tribalism can be dangerous in politics and Christianity. I consider myself an Arminian because I think the doctrines are important. Yet I attended a Calvinist seminary, have close Calvinist friends and will gladly lock arms with them in

worship and ministry any day. But I consider this topic important enough to read and write about a couple of times a year. And I am thankful yet again to Dr. Picirilli for the impetus to think about, react to and create in the sphere of theology. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to have their mind stretched, even if it is by Jonathan Edwards more so than Robert Picirilli. Because the point of the book is to debate, not pontificate. I only wish the other three men were alive to respond.

Five Amazing Truths About Election On Which Every Christian Should Agree

Editor's Note: This article was written as a follow up to an article published earlier this year by REO on Five Statements made by Arminius that even Calvinists can agree with. If you missed that article you can read it [here](#).

Aside from the myth of the [Rapture](#), nothing stirs up a theological hornets nest like Predestination and Election. Just five minutes ago, I overheard some students at my high school debating Arminianism and Calvinism. They don't even get that worked up over Trump! While I don't want to diminish the points of disagreement, I find it helpful to discuss five truths surrounding the doctrine of Election that all Christians, whether Arminianist or Calvinist in leaning, can (and should) agree on.

Election equates Christians with God's chosen people.

When the writers of the New Testament use the term "elect" their first century audience would have thought immediately about God's chosen people in the Old Testament. Peter calls believers a "Chosen Nation" and a "Royal Priesthood." In doing so, he identifies the calling of the believer with the calling of God's chosen people Israel. Just like the people of God under the Mosaic Covenant, Christians also have a calling to worship God as one people and to be a priesthood for other "nations" who do not know the God of the Bible. As priests our role is to connect the nations with the one true God. This is not through animal sacrifice, but by the living sacrifice of a Gospel-centered life.

Election speaks to our being in Christ.

The title "Christ" denotes Jesus' position as God's "Chosen one." He is the Lord's anointed, the chosen king, THE servant spoken of in Isaiah; Jesus is the Elect (Luke 9:35). Ephesians 1 tells us that we have been chosen "in Him." Our status as "the elect" is made possible because we belong to "The Elect" One. We are chosen because we belong to the Chosen one.

Election connects us a larger community of faith.

Perhaps this is a restatement of point number one, but from a different angle. As modern Americans, we envision faith as private and individualistic. We need a greater emphasis on the community of faith. Too often we think that the gospel is about me and God. Paul, however, usually presents the gospel as us and God. While we are certainly not saved because of the faith of others, every passage about election in the scripture is addressed to groups of Christians. When John calls the congregation receiving his letter "The Elect Lady" (2 John 1:1) the point is clear—the people of faith are God's elect.

This emphasis on community is why the church father Cyprian proclaimed that “there is no salvation outside of the Church.” Christianity never imagines the Christian life outside of a community of faith. To be Elect is to belong to something bigger.

Election makes ethnic differences insignificant.

Many Puritans applied the idea of “the Elect Nation” to what they thought were God’s eschatological purposes for the nation of England. In doing so, they missed the purpose of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians. There is a reason Paul spends the first chapter of Ephesians discussing Predestination and Election. There is a reason he asserts God’s activity and the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice. In establishing these doctrines, Paul is getting to his point in chapter 2–The unity of Jew and Gentile. God is creating “one new humanity out of two.” (Ephesians 2:15) Any feelings of racial superiority or hostility are burned away by the truth that in Christ we are one people. (For more on this you can read this [article](#))

Election makes no room for pride.

In light of all these truths, the doctrine of election should primarily be a humbling one. We don’t deserve to be God’s chosen people, we don’t deserve to be in Christ, we don’t deserve to be part of a family of faith, we don’t deserve to be healed of our racism. As much as we may or may not have tried, we have done nothing to deserve God’s election. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

If Ephesians 2 is true, rather than prompting us to argue over TULIPs and the order of decrees, maybe the doctrine of election should prompt us to humility, unity, and good works. If it doesn't do that, it's not a doctrine worth teaching.

Paradise Deserted: Can a True Christian Renounce Their Faith? (Apostasy Part 3)

I will not conceal, that there are passages of scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect (of a believer departing from the faith); and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see, are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. *On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine which are worthy of much consideration.*[1. The Writings of Arminius, 1:458] [Jacobus Arminius]

For Part One that introduces this series of essays, Go [here](#).

For Part Two that discusses Hebrews and 2 Peter, Go [here](#).

ONE POINT CALVINISM...

In the previous essay, I looked at two books in the Bible that I believe teach that true believers need to be warned against the possibility of falling away from their faith. But as

Arminius himself noted, there are passages that seem on the surface to teach that a believer is unconditionally secure in Christ. Interestingly, there are many Christians that I have known or heard of that believe that a person comes to Christ by their free will in response to grace, but that cannot apostasize after entering that relationship. I am sure the passages we will look at in this essay are part of why.

YOU ARE ETERNALLY SECURE, FROM EVERYTHING BUT YOURSELF...

Before I get to them, I will say as a blanket statement on these passages that I do not think they are talking about persevering in faith. I think passages like the ones below are meant to teach us that nothing external can take us away from God, that God's love is more powerful than external forces and that God will not retract his promises to us.

These things are different categories of theology to me than apostasy and persevering by faith.

To illustrate, if coming into relationship with God is like being put into a spiritual safe house, God through Scripture makes strong assurances that nothing in this world outside of that safe house can take us out of it. Not even Satan himself. That is God-level protection. He also promises He will do his part to keep us there because he loves us so much. We have no reason to fear. None of these things teach that if I want to leave, I can or cannot. Hebrews, 2 Peter, John 15, etc. are all speaking to the issue of choosing to get out.

And they are clear to me that if I choose to, I can. Because if I choose to, God will remove me.

But let's look at some of these passages. I think we will see that by studying their contexts we will arrive at the opposite conclusion as Hebrews and 2 Peter: their contexts lead us away from these being passages about apostasy. Note direct Scripture quotations are in **bold**.

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John 10:27-28: My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

A. IF YOU DIDN'T LOVE GOD, YOU WOULDN'T FOLLOW JESUS

Jesus is speaking directly to hard-hearted Jews, whom I believe had already rejected God before Christ came and so were naturally not going to accept him as God in the Flesh[2. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest For Truth*, 387-88.] This explains why Jesus said in vs. 26, **You do not believe because you are not my sheep** instead of the other way around. He was not teaching that only his sheep hear him in the sense that some people are called to God unconditionally, but that those to whom special revelation had been given and who had already rejected God were not going to accept Jesus, the Word of God incarnate.[3. Robert

Hamilton, [evangelicalarminians.org/files/Hamilton. The Order of Faith and Election in John's Gospel](http://evangelicalarminians.org/files/Hamilton.The%20Order%20of%20Faith%20and%20Election%20in%20John's%20Gospel)] The whole section in John where Jesus has repeated showdowns with obstinate Jewish leaders testifies to this. In John 5:37, Jesus said, **And the Father has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.** And the opposite in 6:45, **Everyone who has learned from the Father comes to me.** This explains why Jesus made it clear he and the Father were the same (John 5:19, 23; 8:28; 10:30-33) and that they had already rejected God through Moses (John 5:46-47). They rejected God the Father and, consistently, rejected God the Son. By rejecting one, you automatically will reject the other. If

they had accepted God as Father prior they would have loved Jesus (8:42)

B. THE NON-SHEEP WERE ALSO THIEVES...

This matters because I think Jesus in 8:28 is saying plainly to these outside-of-the-covenant Jews that they could not take his true followers out of fellowship with him. They could try and they did. This section of chapter 10 is on the heels of Jesus teaching that robbers would not be able to steal sheep from him. I think this is exactly what the unsaved Jews wanted from the beginning of Jesus's ministry to the end—to take Jesus's followers since they deemed him a liar. But they could not. This is noticeably different than the warnings of Hebrews, where, to keep with the illustration, the sheep fall away because they have a sinful unbelieving heart. This passage is not explicitly about continuance in relationship to God by faith[4. James Leonard, arminianbaptist.blogspot.com/2015/12/eternal-security-and-prooftexts.html]. Hebrews is, at least in significant part.

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Despite the passage not teaching continuance on faith explicitly, Arminius taught that continuance is implied in this passage: “Unless the sheep are in the hands of the shepherd, they can not be safe against Satan.”[5. *The Writings of Arminius*, III:499] This is an argument that can be used for several passages that appear to teach a believer cannot commit apostasy (see conclusion below). We are safe as long as we are his sheep (as long as we ‘are believing,’ etc.)

Romans 8:35-39: Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A. CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

Romans 1-3 is making a case that Jews and Gentiles are equally sinful and separated by God, which at the time of transition from Old Covenant to New, was crucial to preach. Jews needed to be humbled and Gentiles needed hope that they were equal in God's eyes. Romans 4-7, among other things, is about the supremacy of Christ in regards to our sinful state—how he is the object of our faith, how he died for us while we were enemies, how we can live resurrected from sin because of him and how he sets us free from the body of death.

B. ENCOURAGEMENT, NOT WARNING...

Chapter 8 is, in part, about encouraging Christians in their walk. 8:1 makes it clear **there is no condemnation in Christ**. Verses 14-16 say, **The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'**. Verse 34 asks and answers, **Who will condemn us? No one**. Note how he says implies that his audience is tempted to live in fear again because of the idea of being enslaved and condemned again. This is important to understanding vs. 35-39. He is writing this particular section to assure a potentially fearful people, not warn a potentially rebellious people. It is not the same context or

focus as Hebrews.

If I am talking to woman who, because of abuse in the past, is struggling with fear that her husband won't love her forever and I know her husband well and that he loves her unconditionally, I will give an entirely different message than to a woman I am sensing is tempted to cheat on her husband. Romans 8 is not about continuing in your faith when faced with apostasy. The audience (at least at this part) needed affirmation of God's love; not warnings. Hebrews, while not exactly opposite (both books deal with the supremacy of Christ because this is the heart of Christianity), was still very different in this respect.

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Both Jews and Gentiles to whom Paul wrote had the potential to struggle in their confidence. Jews because the weight of the law, which Jesus came to fulfill and abolish. No one could condemn them on the basis of that any longer. Gentiles could struggle because they were not primarily God's chosen people in the previous covenant. But no one could condemn them either because Christ is sufficient for all peoples everywhere under a new, better covenant. This is the point of this section of Romans. It has essentially nothing to do with continuance in relationship to God by faith. Hebrews does. John 15 does. These are the places to go for a clear explanation of apostasy.

Philippians 1:6: "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the

day of Christ Jesus.”

This verse is teaching us that God is faithful to do his part in our salvation[6. Robert Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 202]. Just as if I asked Steve Lytle to help tutor me in Spanish and he promised to show up every week, fully prepared, fully patient and fully competent to help me achieve fluency and to help me work on it for the rest of my life, I have no doubt he could promise that and it would have nothing to do with whether I kept with it until the end.

Just as with Romans 8 and John 10, this verse and its context are not about whether believers can depart from the faith.

2 Timothy 2:15: If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

I do not believe this means “If we are faithless in our relationship to him, He is faithful in his part so that he keeps us in relationship”. That is reading something in the verse that is not there from the verse itself or the context.

The previous verse says if we deny him, he will deny us. That sounds clearer because it speaks more to the relationship itself. That God “remains faithful,” I think, means that he will not deny his own character[7. Forlines, 272]. That is what the last phrase in vs. 15 is saying. He is faithful to respond with his just character, which means he will deny us as the previous verse says. Because God must judge sin, in this case a denying of him in relationship which is as serious and final a sin and judgment as their is. The teachings of 2 Peter, John 15 and Hebrews, coincide with this interpretation in a much clearer way.

IF YOU’VE EXPLAINED ONE, YOU MAY HAVE EXPLAINED THEM ALL...

There are other passages that are used and I will not treat them in detail. I will say that most of my points above apply

to many of the other passages commonly cited for eternal security with no possibility of apostasy (like Romans 11:29 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

It is not my aim to make anyone obsessively fearful that their salvation is in jeopardy. That is why we have passages like John 10 and Romans 8. But it would also be intellectually dishonest of me to never warn people that apostasy can happen.

Some passage promise things like Jesus's followers have eternal life and never having to die and things like this (John 3:36, 5:24, etc). The idea with these is that thees things are true so long as the person continues to follow by faith. Picirilli explains in great detail how the English present continuous form of "is/are believing" can express the Greek correctly. This means that I as long as I "am believing" there are numerous promises given to me as a child of God[8. Picirilli, 200-01].

WARNINGS ARE LEGIT, FEAR IS NOT...

It is not my aim to make anyone obsessively fearful that their salvation is in jeopardy. That is why we have passages like John 10 and Romans 8. But it would also be intellectually dishonest of me to never warn people that apostasy can happen.

Again, back to the different audiences—some people who are struggling need God's promises that he loves us. Others who are dabbling too often in sin and doubt may need my second essay.

At the end of the day, I'm not trying to put a notch in my belt or "score one" for Arminiansm as much as I am trying to teach the Bible. This is what I believe it teaches.

Paradise Deserted: Can a True Christian Renounce Their Faith? (Apostasy Part 2)

But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, *that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with full persuasion of our minds.*[1. Taken from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 548-49] [Five Articles of The Remonstrance, Article 5, written in 1610]

Read Part One [Here](#).

TEACHING MORE THAN ARGUING

As a disclaimer, I plan to argue for why I believe the Bible teaches that a true follower of Christ can renounce their faith and be an unbeliever again, but I realize I'm not going to settle a 500 year debate over this. So my approach is simply to explain what a few important passages mean, not to delve into certain point-counterpoint aspects of Arminian v. Calvinist theology. No doubt a Calvinist will disagree with me, but I am not trying to represent that disagreement

except where absolutely necessary. Space is too limited and I may not represent them well enough.

I also take this approach to assure that my arguments are biblical instead of merely logical. A statement like “God loves people so he would not send them to eternal torment” is logical, but not biblical. It is far too easy on this topic to make “I just don’t see how” statements when the Bible speaks clearly to tell us how. And by warning us that a true Christian can abandon their faith, as the passages below do, they are communicating reality. As Picirilli says, those who do not believe in the possibility of apostasy do not warn against it.[2. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 208]

So without further ado, let’s dive right in. There are two New Testament books that deal with apostasy as a main point of the writing. Note that direct quotes from Scripture will be **bold**.

“Those who do not believe in apostasy do not warn against it.” (Robert Picirilli)

HEBREWS: BE CAREFUL LITTLE HEART HOW YOU TURN

I’m convinced this book is in part a letter to warn true Christians about the dangers of apostatizing from the faith and the author is so concerned, he repeats this warning several times. In 2:1, after establishing Christ as superior to everything, he says, **For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.** What does it mean to drift away? Well I think as he continues to write, that answer becomes clearer.

In 3:12, after using the hardened hearts of the Israelites in the wilderness as an example of **going astray** he says, **Take care, brothers, that there not be in any one of you an evil,**

unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. Note two things: He says, **brothers** which means he is directing a warning to real Christians[3. For a more detailed account of the recipients of Hebrews please read James Leonard at Arminian.Blogspot.com "[Eternal Security and Exegetical Overview of the Book of Hebrews](http://Arminian.Blogspot.com)"] and secondly, that unbelief and falling away are linked. Faith puts you in covenant, so it follows that unbelief (inseparable from evil) would take you out.

But the clearest portion of Hebrews that speaks to who and what this "falling away" means is 6:4-6. Picirilli lays out his translation of these verses and separates the clauses in such a way so that you can see how they are related:

**For it is impossible for those
who were once for all enlightened
and who tasted the heavenly free gift
and who became partakers of the Holy Spirit
and who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming
age
and who fell away
To be being renewed again to repentance.**[4. Picirilli, 216]

Picirilli lays it out this way so you can see the relationship between five clauses: four that have verbs explaining their relationship to God and a fifth with a verb to describe what they did after. They are all equal, coordinate clauses with the same grammar tense[5. Ibid, 221]. Translations often obscure the relationship between the clauses by adding words[6. Most infamously, the KJV adding "if" before the 5th clause, while not its intention, has led some to believe it is hypothetical. More on that below.].

However, first it is imperative to prove that the passage is talking about a genuine Christian, as opposed to someone who is not truly a follower of Christ. Dr. Picirilli says unilaterally that "There is no doubt those lives refer to

genuine Christians.”[7. Picirilli, *Perseverance* (a booklet), 20] The first clause uses the word **enlightened** which he also uses in 10:32 in a way that appears to refer to conversion.

Once for all occurs several other times in Hebrews and means something like “once effectively” in the sense that it needs nothing added to it or to be repeated[8. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 217]. That communicates completeness.

The people described [In Hebrews 6:4-6] were entirely enlightened, intimately close to the Holy Spirit and had fully experienced God’s free gift, among other things. It seems to me that the author is going above and beyond to make it clear these are people who knew God in relationship through his grace, Word and Holy Spirit. Picirilli concludes, “If you wanted a better definition of conversion, you could not find it!”

Two of the clauses use **tasted** which can be a misleading (even if precise) translation because it is a word used for full-fledged eating elsewhere (Acts 10:10) and also because in Hebrews 2:9 the word is used for Christ having **tasted death**[9. Ibid]. It follows that the people described here experienced **the free heavenly gift** and **God’s good word** as intimately as Christ experienced death. Which is to say, totally. Any attempt to read too much into the use of the Greek genitive (which can explain what was experienced instead of the extent it was experienced) for the free gift clause here fails, as Hebrews 2:9 uses the Greek genitive for Christ tasting death[10. Ibid, 218].

The fourth clause is about being **partakers of the Holy Spirit**.

F. Leroy Forlines comments, “In Hebrews 3:14 we find a reference in which the same Greek word as partake in Hebrews 6:4 is used. It reads: **For we are made partakers of Christ**.

This would certainly refer to a close relationship.” He goes on to compare the word to a companion or someone who is in

agreement with[11. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest For Truth*, 278].

By using other verses and words in Hebrews, Picirilli and Forlines assure us that the words are being interpreted correctly and that we do not use any tortured exegesis to make them say something they do not mean. The people described were entirely enlightened, intimately close to the Holy Spirit and had fully experienced God's free gift, among other things. It seems to me that the author is going above and beyond to make it clear these are people who knew God in relationship through his grace, Word and Holy Spirit. Picirilli concludes, "If you wanted a better definition of conversion, you could not find it!"[12. Picirilli, *Perseverance*, 20]

But that leads us back to why the clauses are laid out by Picirilli the way they are. Could the "fall away" clause be hypothetical? Could the author be communicating something that could happen but will not? The grammar makes this extremely unlikely. All five clauses have the same constructions as far as verb form and tense, aorist participles[13. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 227]. In other words, there is nothing in the text that even implies that the first four are real and the fifth is hypothetical. It is conclusive, to me at least, that if the first four are objective reality, the fifth one is too. They fell away just as surely as they tasted the heavenly gift.

To illustrate: Suppose I say, "Consider those who ate fast food every day. And who played video games all day. And who did not exercise. And who were unhealthy as a result". A natural reading says all of these things happened. The last sentence is just as factual as the first three. This is essentially what Hebrews 6:4-6 communicates. Greek has several ways to communicate hypotheticals. And even hypotheticals that cannot happen, like "I wish I were taller".

But aorist participles as they are used here do not communicate this. What he is saying in Hebrews 6:4-6 is what

did happen, not what *could* happen. Additionally, it starts by saying “It *is* impossible” not “It *would be* impossible.”[14. Ibid.] This eliminates, to me at least, the possibility that Hebrews 6:9 (**We are convinced of better things in your case**) is saying that what he says in 4-6 is something that could happen but will not. There isn’t a shred of hypothesis in this passage. Only a real life indicative warning.

So what does **fall away** mean? I think it means exactly what the similar expression means in Hebrews 3:12 above. It means to fall away in the sense of having a sinful, unbelieving heart. The word in 6:6 isn’t used anywhere else in the New Testament but is used in the LXX in places like Ezekiel 18:24, which also appears to describe apostasy founded in unrighteousness[15. Ibid, 220]. And lest there be any confusion, it follows by saying these people **cannot be renewed again to repentance**. That goes beyond merely suggesting these people are now lost. It’s firm. They are outside of repentance, one word used as the condition of salvation (‘faith’ being the other). This would mean the apostasy is final[16. Ibid, 222-24. For a contrary Arminian perspective, see Brian Abasciano, evangelicalarminians.org/brian-abasciano-my-argument-for-apostasy-not-being-irremediable-in-hebrews-6/ Note that Abasciano is not arguing against irremediable apostasy totally but that Hebrews 6 may not be teaching it.].

Suppose I say, “Consider those who ate fast food every day. And who played video games all day. And who did not exercise. And who were unhealthy as a result”. A natural reading says all of these things happened. The last sentence is just as factual as the first three. Hebrews 6:4-6 explains what did happen, not what could happen.

Hebrews 10:26-29 in one sense completes the series of detailed apostasy warnings by affirming that **if we go on sinning**

willfully after we have received a knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment...How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

I am confident that using the word **sanctified**—which in Hebrews with one exception always refers to the sanctity of salvation[17. Forlines, page 280-81]—and even by saying **we** in the beginning, the writer is giving a real warning to other Christians, including himself. And what the person does by **sinning willfully and regarding Christ's blood as unclean** sounds like a person outside of covenant with God[18. For an explanation of how 'willful sins' in Numbers 15 equates with New Testament teachings on apostasy, please see Forlines, page 282-83]. Scot McKnight says, in reference to all of the Hebrews warning passages: "...the sin the author has in mind is a willful rejection of God and his Son, Jesus the Messiah, and an open denunciation of God and his ethical standards." [19. Scot McKnight, "The Warning Passages in Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions" (published in Trinity Journal), 39]. This can only refer to a person who has sinned so as not in covenant relationship with God. And the result is the same as 6:6: there is no more sacrifice (i.e., forgiveness) for sins, removing any doubt this person is now lost.

Hebrews offers a couple of more warnings of apostasy in 10:30 (**Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.**) and 12:25 (**See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.**). The repetition only enforces the reality of the danger of what can happen to a true Christian.

2 PETER: ONCE YOU ESCAPE, THE ENEMY KEEPS PURSUING

The beginning of Peter establishes that he is writing to fellow Christians (**those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ**) and is encouraging them to live well. And he concludes by telling them make their election sure. Dr. James Leonard comments on the first ten verses of 2 Peter 1: “Thus, the letter was written to urge believers to grow in Christ so that they will not stumble, and so that they may successfully complete their pilgrimage to their eschatological reward. Of course, it would be wholly tautological to urge believers to make every effort to confirm their calling and election if they were, in fact, unconditionally secure therein.”[20. James Leonard, arminanbaptist.blogspot.com [“Exegetical Overview of 2 Peter and Eternal Security: Forewarned Not to Fall From Your Secure Position”](#) This reminds me of this quote I read recently by Matt Pinson writing about Daniel Whitby on fwbtheology.com: “If God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) and preordains a state of affairs in which some men are not divinely enabled to obey His command, then there is a disjunction between His command (“Repent!”) and His intent (“I have no intention of enabling you to repent; in fact I have predetermined the universe in such a way that you can never repent”)..]

“It would be wholly tautological to urge believers to make every effort to confirm their calling and election if they were, in fact, unconditionally secure therein.” (James Leonard)

2 Peter 2:1 adds the theme of conditional security by saying, **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.** The fact the

Master had **bought them** sounds very much like Christian redemption in covenant relationship (2 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). And **denying** is a strong verb of relational rejection (cf. Matt. 10:33, 2 Timothy 2:12). And from here throughout this section of the letter, Peter is warning against false teachers who can tempt a believer to defect from the faith.

It is the last part of chapter 2 that speaks most forcefully to apostasy of the genuine Christian. In verses 18-22 there are three phrases that describe the people Peter is referring to.

1. They **have escaped from the pollutions of this world**.
The quoted phrase can be found in vs. 20 here and in 1 Peter 1:4, where Peter is describing their salvation experience[21. Picirilli, 230].
2. They escaped **by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ**. In his commentary on 2 Peter, Picirilli makes the case that the word for knowledge (*epignosis*, a compound verb that goes beyond mere head knowledge) is often a conscious attempt to communicate saving knowledge of Christ one gains at conversion[22. Picirilli, *Commentary on 2nd Peter*, 285-92]. It is the knowledge used twice times in the first few verses of 1 Peter to describe genuine Christianity.
3. They **have come to know the way of righteousness**. The word “know” is the verb form of “knowledge” in point 2 and “the way of righteousness” refers back to two very similar phrases in 2:2 and 2:15, both of which seem to refer to salvation[23. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 230-31]. It is at least possible the use of “the way” in all three of these 2 Peter 2 verses is a reference the the name the first Christians used in Acts to refer to themselves as the true sect of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22; cf. John 14:6).

“If [the people described in 2 Peter 2:18-22] were never

saved, how could they be 'again' entangled?"

So what did these people do? They were **overcome and again entangled by the pollutions**. The word 'again' is notable since the pollutions are what they were saved from. They were right back where they were before they were saved. (And If they were never saved, how could they be 'again' entangled?) Secondly, they **turned away from the holy command handed to them**. And their destiny seals the case for their present condition: **their last state is worst than the first and they would have been better off not knowing the way of righteousness**. This can only be a group of people that is no longer saved and whose judgment is finally determined as in irremediable apostasy.

And as if all that were not clearly enough explained, he closes in 3:17 by saying, **Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position**. It is very hard to try to make that mean something other than what it seems to say, especially in view of the rest of the book. It's entirely in context with its naturally read meaning.

As much as I would love it if the writer of Hebrews and Peter had used a simple word like "Christian" or "true disciple" (those these words are vehemently implied by the use of words like "brothers") to describe these apostates, the books are too rich in detail. Yet I am confident the detail makes the case even stronger that these were people of legitimate conversion.

BUT THERE ARE SO MANY MORE...

I wish space allowed for a detailed treatment of John 15, Colossians 1:21-23, Revelation 1-3, and a few verses from the letters to Timothy and other passages. But suffice it to say that when a Biblical writer is addressing a group of Christians and makes statements like **if you continue in your faith** or **if you don't abide in me, you will be thrown away** or **if you endure to the end you will be saved** then I think he is speaking to conditional perseverance. Conditioned on faith.

And I believe that Paul names names to Timothy of people who did in fact apostasize from the faith. Finally, both the idea of a sin that cannot be forgiven (Matt 12:32) and a sin that "leads to death" (1 John 5:16) make more sense to me within the teachings of apostasy.

But the case rises and falls on Hebrews and 2 Peter. If it can be proven—and I think it can—that these two authors truly believed the people they were writing to could forfeit their faith and therefore were warning them, then I think we must teach that apostasy is real for the true Christian.

Part 3 can be read [here](#).

Paradise Deserted: Can A True Christian Renounce Their Faith? (Apostasy Part 1)

(God) wills that they, who believe and *persevere in faith*, shall be saved, but that those, who are unbelieving and

impenitent, shall remain under condemnation.[1.*The Works of Arminius* 3:412] [Jacobus Arminius, italics mine]

“YOU MEAN ALL BAPTISTS AREN’T THE SAME?”

I remember being a first year Bible College student in the late 90s and visiting Mississippi with a friend for the weekend. Even though we both attended a Free Will Baptist college, he attended a Missionary Baptist church in his hometown. I had no idea of the differences; I was young and stupid (as opposed to now, older and less stupid).

The pastor taught the Sunday School class we went to. He opened the class by asking if anyone knew what “apostasy” was. Well, born and raised Free Will Baptist, I knew. I stood up and proudly told the class that it was when a Christian gives up their salvation and becomes lost again. He bristled, chided my answer and then spent the rest of the class explaining why I was wrong and what apostasy really was. (I’m hesitant to add that he later stopped by my friend’s parents’ house to warn them that I was trying to confuse his flock.)

“I’LL NEVER MAKE THAT MISTAKE AGAIN...”

This was enough for me to want to study the subject. And for nearly 20 years, I have. It’s something I study on a regular basis. Yet one reason I’ve waited months since the inception of REO to tackle it is because I have not been sure I can do so without repeating nearly verbatim what Dr. Robert Picirilli teaches in *Grace, Faith, Free Will*. As far as I’m concerned, that is as good an explanation as it gets. I don’t like to just regurgitate what I’m taught. I obviously prefer to process things and think through them and come up with my own words. But I have not been able to do that with Dr. Picirilli’s writing on this topic.

But I have decided to try. I recently reread *Grace, Faith,*

Free Will for at least the 15th time and have studied other Arminian materials as well, notably from the Society of Evangelical Arminians, which I recently joined. So this is a result of that. This article will be in three parts: an introduction (this), an interpretation of two key Bible books and other texts that teach apostasy, and why I do not believe some texts teach that believers are eternally secure even though they are commonly used to do so.

When I first read Arminius's writings, I was surprised to find out that he wasn't entirely convinced that a true Christian could apostatize. But I think the Remonstrants after him followed his thinking to its logical end in teaching that a true believer could.

THIS IS WHAT I BELIEVE...

Let me be upfront and clear about one thing: I am an Arminian. To be more specific, I suppose I would be a Reformed Arminian.

As far as I can tell, I would not be perfectly in line with some sub-Arminian groups on this topic. That will be important as I will explain below.

I do my best to align myself with the Bible as I understand it and as I've been taught it, after I think through the teachings. And as a result, I've found myself very much in line with Arminius' writings on key topics, and also with people like F. Leroy Forlines and the aforementioned Dr. Picirilli in present day. When I first read Arminius's writings, I was surprised to find out that he wasn't entirely convinced that a true Christian could apostatize[2. Ibid, 1:258]. But I think the Remonstrants after him followed his thinking to its logical end in teaching that a true believer could[3. See *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (translated by Mark Ellis), notably Chapter 18, Articles 5-6. Mostly notably, consider this quote from Article 6: "Those who remain constant for some time in the true faith and in a

certain holy purpose and demonstrate for a while the truth of their faith by good and holy works; but finally, whether by the enticements of the world, the flesh or Satan, or conquered and broken by some violent tyranny, they defect and desert from the faith.” This was written 12 years after Arminius’ death and represents a more developed view on apostasy than what his followers wrote in 1610.]].

I am not Reformed Arminian or even Free Will Baptist because I was raised that way. I am those things because I am convinced they are correct. I’ve rejected many things—biblically, politically and otherwise—from my youth after I thought through them and wrestled with them. I’ve read a substantial amount on both sides of this topic. I am not ignorant of counterarguments against what I believe.

So let me put this out there as plain and succinctly as I can: **I believe the Scriptures clearly and lovingly warn genuine followers of Jesus Christ that they can forfeit their faith and become unbelievers (unsaved, lost, etc.) again.** Many in my denomination get upset when a person says we teach that you can “lose your faith” because that is at best poorly worded and at worst a misrepresentation of what FWBs teach. I’m not going to go berserk if a person uses that phrase, but I will submit there are much better words to use because they are Biblical: A true Christian can “fall away” from the faith; or have a “sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from God”; or can become “again entangled” in false teaching and be “overcome” by it; or can make “shipwreck of their faith”. Or countless other words and phrases. The two verbs I use in my title—‘desert’ and ‘renounce’—in regards to faith and apostasy are very close to how I think the Bible teaches it. Much better than a word like ‘lose’ with faith since apostasy is a conscious decision and not an accident.

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poorly worded and at worst a misrepresentation of what FWBs teach...there are much better words to use because they are Biblical: A true Christian can “fall away” from the faith; or have a “sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from God”; or can become “entangled again” in false teaching; or can “make shipwreck of their faith”.

OK, SO NOT ALL ARMINIANS ARE THE SAME EITHER...

I do not believe that a Christian can give up their salvation and then later become a follower of Christ again. I do not think that can happen even once, much less over and over.

There are two possible movements in covenant relationship with God: You can move into covenant by faith through God's grace, once. And you can, if you choose, be taken back out by God's judgment. After that, it's over. That will be dealt with in Part 2 when I talk about Hebrews 6 and what it means.

But this helps classify me as a certain type of Arminian and helps prevent me from being lumped with some Arminian theology that I do not agree with. Repeated Regeneration is not part of my understanding on this.

Let me be clear as well: My goal over the two parts to this essay after this one is to explain what I think the Bible teaches. I am going to try to avoid creating counterarguments that will be nothing but straw men, which, as Dr. Picirilli says, “go down much too easily”[4. *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, from the Forward, iii. Dr. Picirilli admirably uses Calvinists own words in his book to represent them. We all could learn from that as you cannot truly debate someone if you do not understand and cannot articulate their view, in my opinion.]. So instead of anticipating what I consider to be wrong teaching I plan to just focus on the correct interpretations. That is my aim at least. We will see how well I do.

IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE DR. PICIRILLI, YOU KNOW WHY...

And finally, I want to add that I am no scholar. I am somewhat educated but not nearly to the level of many of my peers and teachers. Therefore, you will find a lot of citations over the next two parts of this essay, from all the people I have mentioned until now (Forlines, Picirili, Arminius himself) and from other intelligent, credible teachers as well. I'm not doing this because I need to tell an audience what I know about the Bible. I'm doing this because the Reformed Arminian view needs to be taught in as many avenues as possible. Not because it's of a certain group or denomination, but because I believe it is correct theology in interpretation and practice.

And if a believer can renounce their faith, we better be warning people about the possibility of it. I am very convinced Peter, Paul, the author of Hebrews, et al, all believed in the reality of genuine Christian apostasy. Because they wrote about it.

So I want to do right by them and their writings, which I strongly and unashamedly consider Scripture. This is an attempt at that.

Part 2 can be found [here](#).

Part 3 can be found [here](#).