

Arminianism vs Calvinism – Does It Matter?

There have been times when I've brought up the doctrine of predestination only to be told that it doesn't matter if it's true or not. The argument is that since people have different views on the subject, and since those views have no practical applications¹, it doesn't matter which one is true – and therefore there's no point in discussing the subject at all.

In fact, I've encountered this attitude that “the truth doesn't matter” when talking about a number of different doctrines. The doctrines of creation “don't really matter”. Perhaps God created the world in 6 days, or perhaps He used 14 billion years; in the end it doesn't really change anything². Likewise, I've been told that the doctrines of eschatology (the study of end times) don't matter either. Things will all “pan out” in the end, and none of it makes any difference in our life anyway³.

I've encountered a surprising number of Christians who believe that the truth isn't important. If the topic isn't the gospel then I've been told I should just “agree to disagree” and move on to something that's “actually important”. From what I can tell, the reason churches do this is to avoid division. They seem to believe that the best way to unite the body of Christ is by ignoring everything the Bible teaches except for the most basic and fundamental doctrines.

I believe this is a terrible error. You won't find this attitude anywhere in the Bible! None of the apostles believed that the truth doesn't matter. In fact, Jude once decided to *not* talk about the gospel because he thought it was more important to address the problem of heresy:

1 A point I strongly disagree with.

2 I think it changes a great deal!

3 I think it can make a huge difference in our life.

Jude 1:3: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Jude commanded his readers to *earnestly contend for the faith*. He thought the truth was worth defending and he commanded us to defend it. The apostle Paul likewise commanded us to hold on to the truth:

2 Timothy 1:13: “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

Sadly, many churches are no longer doing this. Instead they're abandoning many doctrines in a foolish quest for superficial unity. They're ignoring the fact that Jesus Himself said the truth is divisive:

Matthew 10:34-35: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”

The simple reality is that *every single truth in the Bible is divisive*. There are no truths that aren't a source of contention – not even the truth that God exists! Throwing out the very words of God in order to make friends is a bad idea. The Lord hasn't called us to pragmatism; instead He's called us to *hold fast to everything* He has told us.

God didn't divide His words into “things that matter” and “things you can safely ignore”. Every word of God matters! Every truth in the Bible is important and should be defended. I

think these quotes sum it up pretty well:

“It’s popular to just smile and say of the protestant church, “On the essentials of salvation we all agree, but in the non-essentials there’s room for lots of different opinions.” Baloney. The Bible is not a document written to provide a debating society with lots of different positions. It’s the Word of God and it’s not subject to man’s opinion. Though we may not like it all, we don’t have the right to re-interpret it to suit our desires.” (source unknown)

“I challenge anyone to provide a solid Bible foundation for the “in essentials unity” doctrine. I don’t want a lesson in church history. What old-time fundamentalists did or did not do is interesting and sometimes educational but it has zero authority. I don’t want a lesson in pragmatism. Whether or not “unity in essentials” would further “revival” or “evangelism” or “bringing America back to God” or “creation science” or any number of other objectives is neither here nor there, because pragmatism has no authority. The sole authority for faith and practice is the Bible, and the fact is that there is no support for “in essentials unity” in the Bible. It is a man-made principle created to further a pragmatic agenda.” (David Cloud)

“Many have been carried away from full obedience by a noble-sounding motto which has been applied to Christian work. ‘In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity.’ Some things are not essential to salvation but they are essential to full

obedience, and the Christian has no liberty under God to sort out the Scriptures into essentials and nonessentials! It is our duty to declare the whole counsel of God, and to do it wherever we are." (David Nettleton)

One of the great problems with modern churches is that too many of them think like this: "Since you can believe that particular error and still be saved, that error isn't worth confronting. It's better to leave it alone and get on with the business of preaching the gospel." That may sound wise but it's utterly foolish. Jude certainly didn't believe that, and the apostle Paul didn't either. The disciples aggressively attacked heretics. You'll never find them saying "Just preach Jesus and don't worry about it". Even *Jesus Himself* rebuked heresy:

Matthew 22:29: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

It's *always* wrong for a church to look at a person who's teaching something that directly contracts the Bible and say that it doesn't make any difference. That attitude shows a lack of respect for God, for His Word, and for the truths that He has revealed to us. All of His words matter. Every truth that He has revealed to us matters. Every doctrine is worth defending and every doctrine ought to be defended. The modern church has become far too tolerant of error. If you can't understand why the truth should be defended then I fear for your soul.

Which brings us back to the subject at hand. Calvinism and Arminianism are radically different. In fact, they're so different that they're mutually exclusive. They hold opposing views on who God is, on how salvation works, on how faith faith, and on what grace is. These differences are more than just philosophical. There's a tremendous difference between the Arminian view that God has made salvation available to everyone

and is hoping that people will respond to that invitation, and the Calvinist view that God chooses to save some people and chooses to cast the rest into Hell. The difference is night and day, and they *cannot* both be true.

It's foolish to say that the nature of God doesn't matter, or that it makes no difference how salvation works. If the nature of God didn't matter then He wouldn't have spent the *entire Bible* revealing who He was! If the inner workings of salvation weren't important then He wouldn't have spent so much of the New Testament explaining them in great detail. It's very arrogant to dismiss all those things which God said by claiming the truth of the matter isn't important. *It's clearly important to God*, so it ought to be important to us as well.

There's another reason why it matters. I've noticed that some Arminians have a passionate hatred for the God of Calvinism. I've heard them say they'll never believe in predestination because they refuse to believe in a God who would choose to send someone to Hell. They say that kind of God wouldn't be worth serving because He would be a monster on the same level as the Devil. I've even heard some say they would *rather go to Hell* than serve a God like that.

If Calvinism is actually true then that attitude is a serious problem because it means those people *utterly despise God*. That's very dangerous ground to be standing on! It's never a good idea to tell God that you think He's evil and you will never serve Him. Jesus told us the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, *and you can't do that if you despise who He is*.

I've talked to a number of people about their Arminian beliefs. The conversation tends to end the same way: they agree the Bible supports Calvinism but they won't change their beliefs because they refuse to believe God is actually like that. At the end of the day they say this: "Yes, the Bible does teach that but I'll never believe it." What the Bible actually says just doesn't matter. People think nothing about rejecting the Bible's teachings and believing whatever they want.

Since I've already written about Calvinism elsewhere I won't repeat that discussion here. My point is that the truth matters to God, and therefore it ought to matter to us as well. I become alarmed whenever I hear a Christian say “I know what the Bible says, but I just believe differently,” On doctrine after doctrine there are too many Christians who simply don't care what the Bible teaches. This is a serious issue, and it deserves a stronger response than “Who cares?”

It's entirely possible for two different Christians to study a subject with honest intentions and come to opposite conclusions. However, that doesn't mean both conclusions are equally valid and the truth isn't important! *Somebody* is wrong, and someone is guilty of teaching heresy – and that ought to matter to us.