

The Lord Opened Her Heart (Acts 16:13-15)^a

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Context

1. Paul and Silas, now accompanied by Timothy and Luke, are on what will become known as the second missionary journey.
2. Having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the gospel in the Roman province of Asia and Bithynia (both regions in modern-day Turkey), they travel across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis and then Philippi in Macedonia (in modern-day Greece).

Passage (Acts 16:13-15)

[13] And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met [there]. [14] Now a certain woman named Lydia heard [us]. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. [15] And when she and her household were baptized, she begged [us], saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.¹

The mystery of God in evangelism

1. **Last time: *Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia* (Acts 16:6).**
 - A. The Roman province of Asia: southwestern portion of modern Turkey containing cities such as Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, Sardis, Pergamos, and Thyatira.
 - B. God blocked their efforts to get the gospel to an area which included Thyatira.
2. **Instead, the Spirit directed them to sail from Troas (modern day Eski Stambul, western Turkey) across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis (modern day Kavala, northern Greece) and then to Philippi.**
3. **They are now approximately 300 miles away from Thyatira, as the crow flies.**
4. **Who "just happens" to be in Philippi?**
 - A. *Lydia . . . a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14)!*
5. **Lydia appears to have been a business woman of means and influence.**

A. Her base of production was Thyatira, but she evidently travelled to Philippi on business.

I. “Thyatira was famous for a purple or crimson dye manufactured from the madder root, which was a cheap rival for the expensive Phoenician murex dye made from a particular marine shellfish. Acts 16:14 attests to this specialty, for the Philippian convert, Lydia, was a seller of purple fabrics who hailed from Thyatira (she was 300 miles from her home city).”²

B. When resident at Philippi, she appears to have had a second home.

I. “The members of her household probably refer to servants as well as to her children, if she was a widow. . . . That she was a woman of considerable means is evidenced by the size of her house. It would have to be ample enough to house four men as well as her household without embarrassment (cf. Acts 16:40).”³

6. Paul normally headed straight for the synagogue, but it appears there was none in Philippi at that time (required 10 Jewish men).

7. Lydia is said to be a “worshiper of God” — a term used of Gentiles who followed the God of Israel.

A. Like Cornelius, the Roman centurion Peter preached to in Acts 10, she was not yet saved.

B. She desired to know God, sought Him, but did not yet know the message of the cross and had not yet been born again.

I. Seeking God, attending church, doing good deeds, and following religious practices does not save.

II. Salvation requires knowing and assenting to the work of Jesus on the cross on our behalf.

III. Some have suggested people may be saved without the knowledge of Jesus.

IV. But, if people can be saved in this age apart from the knowledge of Jesus . . .

a. Why was Peter sent to Cornelius’ house?

b. Why did Paul travel 300 miles beyond Thyatira to preach to a woman from Thyatira who already worshipped God?

8. The mystery of God’s leading: imagine this hypothetical exchange between Paul and God.

- A. Paul: “But God, this is not logical! We wanted to go to the region of Thyatira and present the gospel, but you prevented it and then directed us 300 miles west . . . to minister to a woman from Thyatira!”
- B. God: “THAT’S RIGHT: Lydia wasn’t home: she was gone on a business trip. (Besides there were other people in Macedonia I want to hear the message too.)”

9. Evangelism is not just about taking the gospel to specific places, it’s also about taking the gospel to specific people - those whom God has called.

The Lord opened her heart.

1. Luke informs us that God took the initiative that led to Lydia’s salvation.

2. Where angels fear to tread: Calvinism and Arminianism.

- A. An ongoing in-house disagreement among Christians concerning the roles of God and man in salvation.
- B. How are we to understand issues of sovereignty, independence, and responsibility—of man in relation to God?
- C. Calvinism - based on theological ideas of the French Reformed theologian Jean Calvin (1509–1564).
- D. Arminianism - based on theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609).
 - I. A student of Theodore Beza (Calvin’s successor) at the Theological University of Geneva.

3. Arminianism and Calvinism in a nutshell.

- A. Different views concerning the role of God and man in salvation.
 - I. Ultimately, it is about *who* chooses *whom*?
 - II. Does man choose God (Arminianism)?
 - III. Does God choose man (Calvinism)?
- B. Common ground: the nature of fallen man.
 - I. Adam and Eve, untainted by a sin nature, disobeyed God.
 - II. Men and women today are conceived with a sin nature—we start out in a vastly-inferior condition than Adam and Eve.

a. Total depravity — all aspects of man’s nature are tainted by sin.

i. TOTAL - speaks of breadth, not degree.

- NOT DEGREE - The thoughts and motives of mankind are not always depraved to an extreme degree.
- BREADTH - No aspect of man, such as the mind, will, emotion, is untainted. Man’s totality was twisted by the fall into sin of Adam and Eve. The fall affected *everything* about mankind.

III. Somehow, in this fallen state, men and women are able to do what Adam and Even did not: obey God and respond in faith.

IV. This is the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit — both in Arminianism and Calvinism.

V. As we’ll see, Arminianism and Calvinism differ in their understanding of *how* the Holy Spirit goes about that work.

C. Arminianism in a nutshell: man chooses God.

I. Salvation

a. All men are fallen.

b. All men are drawn equally, making all men equally capable of “choosing God.”

c. The sole determining factor in salvation is whether the individual responds —or rejects.

d. Some people, for whatever reason, are more able or willing to exercise faith while others are not.

e. The determining difference in who gets saved resides within man, not in God.

f. A key difference between Arminianism and Calvinism: the nature of God’s *foreknowledge*.

i. How are we to understand Romans [8:29-30](#) which describes the “chain of salvation?”

- *For whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also **called**; whom He called, these He also **justified**; and whom He justified, these He also **glorified** (Rom. [8:29-30](#)).*
- Both agree the passage describes a sequence of actions by God: Foreknowledge → predestination → calling → justification → glorification.

- Arminianism and Calvinism differ in their understanding of the first link in the chain: God's *foreknowledge*.
 - The Arminian position:
 - God's foreknowledge has no determinative aspect: it is simply "knowledge," decoupled from the influence of His will.
 - God's foreknowledge concerns which people, down through time, will choose Him—exercise saving faith.
 - God knows, in advance, who will choose Him. God then predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies those individuals⁴
 - Before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5), God looked down through the corridor of time, saw who would respond in faith and choose Him, then, based on that knowledge, predestined, called, justified, and glorified those individuals⁵
 - The Arminian position decouples *foreknowledge* from *predestination* and understand it as simply "knowing", but not "determining" or "influencing."
 - More on this later . . .

II. The work of the Holy Spirit

- a. In both systems, the Holy Spirit is able to overcome the darkness of the individual fallen nature making it possible to exercise faith in God and be saved.
- b. The Holy Spirit in the Arminian perspective
 - i. The Holy Spirit draws *all people equally* enabling every person to potentially chose God and be saved⁶
 - ii. What then, prevents all men from doing so—if the Holy Spirit is both willing and able to overcome man's inborn bent to reject God?
 - Man is able to resist God's will, the drawing of the Holy Spirit, to remain in darkness.
 - Although God desires all men to be saved, He is unable (or unwilling) to *effectively* draw all.
 - Man's will can thwart God's desire and ability, by way of the drawing of the Spirit, to save all men.
- c. Since man's will is the determining factor in salvation: having believed, Christians remain insecure—we could fall away from the faith and lose our salvation.
 - i. You might have eternal life now—but lose it next year.
 - ii. You can fall "in and out" of salvation.
 - iii. You can avoid hell, but only if you happen to be "in" at the moment you die.

- d. This is why Arminianism is sometimes characterized as being a “man-centered gospel.”

III. Motivation

- a. Theodicy - God is neutral and fair.
- i. The desire to rescue God from the charge of unfairness if He were to choose *some*, but not *all*, for salvation.
 - ii. The Arminian view of salvation, from the perspective of limited human logic, God seems fair and well-intentioned — He is simply responding to man.
 - iii. BUT: Arminianism has its own problem trying to justify God’s actions.
 - God knew, in advance—before mankind was created—who would respond to Him and be saved.
 - Yet, He *still created those who He knew would not respond*—to wind up eternally damned in hell.
 - Why did He allow those to be born who He knew would not respond? Is God not sovereign over fertility and conception?
- b. Evangelism: the belief that every person is equally able to come to faith in God—if they would simply respond.
- c. Human Logic: a desire to make the means of salvation acceptable to human logic.
- i. If God desires all men to be saved (1Ti. [2:4](#)), then He must draw all equally
 - ii. Some doctrines are highly complex and become distorted when we force them to bow to human logic
 - Trinity
 - Limited atonement / particular redemption (when Calvinism falls prey to this error)

D. Calvinism in a nutshell: God chooses man.

I. Salvation

- a. Like Arminianism, all men are fallen.
- b. God “elects” *some* men and women from among all people throughout history for salvation.
- i. Others are passed by—left in their fallen condition (Rom. [9:22-24](#)).
 - ii. Only the elect are capable of exercising faith and “choosing God.”
- c. The sole determining factor in salvation is God’s election.
- i. Back to the “chain of salvation” of Romans [8:29-30](#)

- ii. *For whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also **called**; whom He called, these He also **justified**; and whom He justified, these He also **glorified** (Rom. 8:29-30).*
- iii. For the Calvinist, no portion of this chain depends on human response.
- iv. Calvinism rejects the circular choosing “slight of hand” of Arminianism which prepends an additional link prior to foreknowledge where *men choose God* Who, knowing their upcoming choice in advance, backs up in time to *call and choose them* in advance of their choosing Him.
- v. Calvinists believe the chain is strictly in-sequence within time and (truly) begins with God’s *foreknowledge*.
 - The Arminian position detaches *foreknowledge* from *predestination*, understanding foreknowledge as simply “knowing” without “determining” or “influencing.”
 - The Calvinist believes the Bible to teach that God’s foreknowledge includes God’s willful determination and influence, not just simply knowing (e.g., Acts 2:23).
 - Two lexicons discuss the Greek terms behind God’s foreknowledge:

γινώσκω [*ginōskō*] is used in the NT first of all of the divine foreknowledge, in relation to which the idea of election is always present. . . . this foreknowledge is not simply knowledge without participation, but rather a “creative willing” . . . In the introduction to 1 Peter (1:1) the readers are addressed as “chosen” in accordance with God’s foreknowledge (v. 2). This election is based on God’s decree . . . ⁷

In sum, both the verb and noun speak primarily of God’s action toward Christ or toward humans, witnessing to that activity as planned and directed.⁸

- The connection between God’s foreknowledge and purpose is made explicit in Acts 2:23
 - *Him [Christ], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death (Acts 2:23).*

II. The work of the Holy Spirit

- a. As with Arminianism, the Holy Spirit is able to overcome the darkness of the individual fallen nature making it possible to exercise faith in God and be saved.
- b. The Holy Spirit in the Calvinist perspective.
 - i. The Holy Spirit draws the elect, enabling them to exercise faith in God and be saved.
 - ii. The elect cannot thwart the drawing of the Spirit. All the elect—every last one—WILL be saved.

- iii. Only the non-elect miss salvation.
- c. Since God is the determining factor, once we believe, Christians are eternally secure in the faith.
- d. This is why Calvinism is sometimes characterized as being a “God-centered gospel.”

III. Motivation

a. Faithfulness to Scripture

- i. Predestination, election and calling are “all over” the NT.
- ii. God’s foreknowledge cannot be simplified down to “simply knowing” without a determining element of His will.
- iii. The salvation experience is everywhere attributed to God, not man.
 - Time permits only a tiny sampling of verses on this huge topic.
 - “born again”, or “born from above” (John 3:3, 7; 1Pe. 1:3, 23)
 - Whoever brought themselves to conception and birth?
 - “born of God” (John 1:13; 1Jn. 5:1, 18)
 - *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)*
 - Given/granted by the Father.
 - *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out (John 6:37).*
 - Not all have been given by the Father.
 - *And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” (John 6:65).*
 - Not all have been granted by the Father.
 - Called/appointed of God.
 - *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39).*
 - All who are called are saved—not a general call.
 - *Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).*
 - The ones that were appointed, from among those which heard, were the ones who believed.
 - The ones who did not believe were not appointed.
 - Arminians read these same passages, but make the initiative of God (birthing, giving, granting, calling, appointing) subject to only those God knows in advance will choose Him.
 - But if He knows they are going to exercise saving faith, where is the need for all this business of birthing, giving, granting, calling, and appointing?

- This is the Arminian “chicken and egg” dilemma.

b. Biblical evangelism

- i. The sophistication and cleverness of our evangelistic schemes is not the determining factor in the effectiveness of evangelism.
- ii. We can share the hard truths of Scripture without fear of “offending or losing possible converts” because our faithfulness to proclaim truth is what the Holy Spirit will honor and use.
- iii. We don’t know who the elect are, so predestination and election are irrelevant in determining when and whom to preach to—we assume every person we come in contact with may be among the elect.
 - Famous evangelists include committed Calvinists: George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, David Brainerd, William Carey.
- iv. Judicial hardening: a difficult aspect of God’s evangelistic purpose is that our faithfulness to preach the unvarnished truth serves to harden and condemn those who God knows will never come to faith.

c. Theodicy - Calvinism does not attempt to sanitize God’s sovereignty.

- i. From man’s perspective and limited logic, God seems unfair in that he passes over some.
- ii. Like Paul, we recognize the charge men will level against God: accusing Him of unfairness or unrighteousness.
 - *What shall we say then? [Is there] unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!* (Rom. 9:14)
 - *You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”* (Rom. 9:19)
- iii. Like Paul, we rest in God’s sovereignty and character — He doesn’t need our defence against the limited conclusions of human logic.
 - *But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed [it], “Why have you made me like this?”* (Rom. 9:20)

iv. Arminianism and Romans 9

- If you want to cut to the chase when discussing these aspects with someone of the Arminian persuasion, ask them to explain why Paul wrote these statements in Romans 9?
 - “Is there unrighteousness with God?” (Rom. 9:14)
 - “Why does He still find fault . . . who has resisted His will?” (Rom. 9:19)
- The thorny questions Paul raises in Romans 9 would never arise if man’s will, rather than God’s, determines who is saved.
- If the Arminian view of salvation is true and God’s predestination of an individual is in response to the faith of that individual, there is no reason to accuse God of potential unrighteousness or unfairness.
- Arminianism wants to side-step these difficult questions by re-ordering what the Bible teaches concerning the process of salvation.
- In the end, Arminianism’s misplaced desire to “sanitize God” also subverts Biblical truth concerning the extent of God’s sovereignty.

4. Summary

A. Key differences

I. Election

- a. Arminianism - based on God's foreknowledge in history of who will choose Him.
- b. Calvinism - based on God's sovereign will, some are passed over.

II. Work of the Holy Spirit

- a. Arminianism - all are drawn, enabled to believe, but some are able to resist the Spirit and reject God.
- b. Calvinism - only some drawn, those who are drawn are irresistibly drawn: guaranteed to come to faith.
- c. Arminianism: salvation is by the Spirit's enablement *combined with* the ability of a subset of men to respond.
- d. Calvinism: salvation is by the Spirit's enablement, *period*.

B. Mabana Chapel [statement of faith](#)^c

I. 6 The Doctrine of Salvation

- a. *A. God the Father planned it as He sovereignly chose some, apart from foreseen human merit or response, to be recipients of His grace from before the foundation of the world. God's election does not negate man's responsibility to believe, the Christian's responsibility to freely offer the gospel to every person, or the fact that God desires salvation to all men (John [1:12-13](#); [6:37-44](#), [65](#); Acts [13:48](#); Ephesians [1:3-5](#); 2 Timothy [1:9](#); [2:3-4](#)).*
- b. *C. God the Spirit applies [salvation] by convicting men of sin, by giving them faith to believe, and by causing them to be born again (John [3:1-7](#); [16:7-11](#); Ephesians [2:8-9](#)).*
- c. *D. Since salvation is by grace, it is impossible for any believer to lose his salvation (John [10:27-29](#); Romans [8:35-39](#); Ephesians [1:13-14](#); 1 Peter [1:3-5](#)).*

C. Sticking to what the Bible says

- I. Both Calvinism and Arminianism are often misrepresented or taken to extremes which distort biblical truth

- II. As with other biblically-deep matters such as the Trinity, most distortions are the result of trying to conform what God has revealed to satisfy our curiosity and the limits of human logic.
- III. Paul's masterful discussion of God's sovereignty in election and salvation in Romans 9 is where we need to leave it: neither adding to or subtracting from what God has revealed.

Sun Jan 21 20:30:59 2018

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 16:13-15](#)
2. [Ref-0479, Rev. 2:18](#)
3. [Ref-0038, 2.399](#)
4. Arminianism must distinguish between the general call of the Spirit to all men and the calling in Romans 8:29-30 which is restricted to only those who are also justified and glorified.
5. "The majority Arminian view is that election is individual and based on God's foreknowledge of faith." [WP, Arminianism^e](#)
6. "Grace is resistible: God takes initiative in the salvation process and his grace comes to all people. This grace (often called prevenient or pre-regenerating grace) acts on all people to convince them of the Gospel, draw them strongly towards salvation, and enable the possibility of sincere faith." [WP, Arminianism^f](#)
7. [Ref-0682, 3.153-154](#)
8. [Ref-1206, p. 491](#)

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0479** Mills, M. (1997, c1987). *Revelations : An exegetical study of the Revelation to John*. Dallas: 3E Ministries.
- Ref-0682** Balz, H. R. and Schneider, G. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990, c1993).
- Ref-1206** Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000). ISBN:0-310-25620-8^g.
- WP** Wikipedia.org

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/54_Acts_16_13-15/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.mabanachapel.org/beliefs.html>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

e - See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism>.

f - See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism>.

g - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-310-25620-8>.