

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Memory, Meaning & Life

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

---

10-16-2010

### Arminianism and Adventism: Assurance of Salvation

David Hamstra

Andrews University, hamstrad@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/mml>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hamstra, David, "Arminianism and Adventism: Assurance of Salvation" (2010). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 60.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/mml/60>

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Memory, Meaning & Life by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# Memory, Meaning & Faith

[Main](#)

[About](#)

[Archives](#)

October 16, 2010

## Arminianism and Adventism: Assurance of Salvation

Keith also brought an Arminius tee-shirt to the conference, but decided not to wear it for similar reasons to Dr. Olson. He's stopped wearing it generally because he got tired of people coming up to him asking him why he was wearing a Shakespeare tee-shirt.

Keith Stanglin remarked that his paper, "Assurance of Salvation: An Arminian Account," is still a bit rough as he only recently found out about the conference. So, he said with tongue in cheek, we'll just have to trust him that he's not making this up, since it's still missing many footnotes.

Arminius view on assurance is important for three reasons.

1. Historical - It illuminates the shape of his debate.
2. Theological - It helps illuminate differences between Calvinists and Arminians.
3. Pastoral - It helps us address assurance today.

Stanglin defines salvation as the healing of the rupture between us and God. It is the state in which we live now and in eternity. The Bible teaches that separation from God can result from doctrinal and ethical error. Jesus himself warned, "Fear him who after killing the body, has power to throw you in to hell." But when does fear become unhealthy and take away the joy of salvation?

When one asks about objective matters of salvation, they are questions about the ontology of salvation. The subjective question of assurance is an epistemological question. The objective matter of fact has become the existential question of the individual before God.

The question of assurance is inevitable in a religion that teaches the salvation of some and condemnation of some. It is also raised by the biblical teaching that salvation is narrow and that many will be cast out who think they are saved. They are common to every tradition that takes the holiness and justice of God seriously.

Much of this assurance talk can be traced back to Augustine, who solved the problem with predestination. On the eve of the Reformation the conversation was dominated by confession and repentance, and it became a frightful experience. The system of merits and purchase of indulgences exaggerated the fear of purgatory and hell.

Luther was the prime example. (He began his career in an Augustinian order.) Protestant churches in general and Reformed churches in particular saw themselves as giving people assurance of salvation. For the reformed, assurance is based on God's good works and is in no way dependant on the fallible believer.

Along came Arminius, most famous for his dissent from the doctrine of supralapsarian predestination. His problems with it revolved around the reconciliation of grace and free will, the problem of evil, and assurance of salvation.

Stranglin defines certainty of salvation as the assurance of salvation by the Holy Spirit in the heart. Arminius saw two pastoral problems with the Reformed system of assurance.

(1) Many of his parishioners had no assurance that they were part of the elect, which led them back to the hopelessness that Luther was trying to escape from in Roman Catholicism. For most Reformed, assurance is supposed to be a component of saving faith, and therefore a person who believes but does not have assurance is likely not part of the elect. Arminius taught that assurance follows saving faith, but is not a part of saving faith. The Reformed response is that because faith is not strong in this life, assurance may be weak as well. But this is small comfort in light of the second problem.

(2) The reprobate can have temporary faith that resembles that of the elect. In other words, a person may appear to have assurance but be self-deceived. So when combined with (3) unconditional predestination, this system undermines assurance and leads to despair. At moments in life, many Christians wonder if they are saved and easily doubt their salvation. In the Reformed context, there is little recourse from this condition, recognizing that there is nothing that one can do to become saved again.

Another problem Arminius noted is that when he exhorted his parishioners to turn from sin, they would remind him that sin is always a part of the Christian life, even for Paul, according to the Reformed view of Rom 7. Arminius called this carelessness, the lack of paying attention to something that deserves care. For the reformed, sanctification takes place in the life of the regenerate, but their progress is baby steps. Arminius contested this reformed interpretation of Rom 7, believing that a life weighted down with sin is not regenerate.

Arminius acknowledged that a truly elect person would not fall away, but also allowed that one can have saving faith and still fall away and that it is possible for them to be brought back. Now it is true that Arminius stated he never publicly taught final apostasy, and when pressed on whether he thought it was possible, he equivocated. Ultimately, he left open the possibility of final apostasy.

Granted that Arminius taught that a person could renounce faith and fall away from God, did he teach that a person could sin in such a way as to fall away from God? Yes, in three ways.

1. He taught that when David sinned, he fell away from God and needed restoration.
2. He also believed that if a person sinned out of malice for Christ, they would fall away.
3. Finally, he believed that sins out of malice indicate the absence of saving faith.

For Arminius, any carelessness about the presence of sin in the life was a "carnal security." For Arminius, "saved if you do; saved if you don't" is the logical outcome of Reformed soteriology, which unjustifiably places one either in despair or security. It was a pastoral problem that led Arminius to reexamine the theological assumptions connected to unconditional predestination. Arminius claimed that a correct doctrine of predestination would lead to a correct doctrine of security. It would comfort afflicted consciences and drive away security from the impious.

Stranglin observes that to place hope on a false foundation is no better than no foundation at all. For Arminius the goal was to avoid both extremes. Along these lines, he articulated four testimonies of salvation. They are not the ground of salvation but rather the evidences thereof.

1. A sense of faith
2. Internal testimony of the Holy Spirit
3. The struggle of the Spirit against the flesh
4. The desire to engage in good works

These are not distinct to Arminianism. The Calvinists used the same for determining if one was part of the elect. The difference is the a priori theological assumptions regarding God's will. For Arminius, God's will is expressed in his two loves.

1. God loves himself and righteousness.
2. God loves his creation.

For Arminius supralapsarian opponents, God's love does not extend to all creation. But for Arminius, God's love comes first to all creation and hates no creature, except because of sin. Although all are not saved, all are equally, antecedently loved by God. Therefore, if one truly seeks God, God is eager to reward the faithful. And therefore one does not have to worry about a secret decree of God. God's love of the creature, however is second only to his justice. Therefore, God will never ignore a believer, nor the sins of an unbeliever.


Stanglin wrapped up his paper with some prescriptive suggestions toward a healthy, biblical perspective on assurance. The question of assurance is one of sanctification and therefore only concerns how one remains a child of God. There are three ways one can relate justification to sanctification.

1. Base sanctification entirely on the past event of justification, collapsing sanctification into justification. This is a


reductionistic view that expects little or no progress in Christian holiness, expressed popularly as "once saved, always saved."

2. To base justification on sanctification. But if assurance is based on the quality and quantity of good works, we can never be sure. This could be described as "once saved, barely saved." Good works are not a causal factor in gaining or maintaining salvation.
3. Instead of the former, Stanglin proposes that faith is the link between justification and sanctification, and the ground of both. It is when active faith ceases in the life that assurance is called into question, because whatever is not of faith is sin. Holiness pursued out of true faith and fervent love is true faith.

Stanglin suggests that this is the practical issue that most quickly gets to the basic differences between Arminians and Calvinists. He recommends that we use the question, How do you know you're a part of the elect? when in dialogue with Calvinists.

Posted by [David Hamstra](#) on October 16, 2010 in [Arminianism and Adventism Symposium](#), [Historical Theology](#) | [Permalink](#)  
[Save to del.icio.us](#) | 

## Comments

 You can follow this conversation by subscribing to the [comment feed](#) for this post.

I don't find Arminius' path to assurance all that assuring. I don't see how looking to myself is going to help. I don't see how looking at God's love of himself is going to help. I find more comfort in Luther's advice that we cling to the word of promise, expressed to us in the Gospel, especially in Baptism. Thus, as he says in the Large Catechism,

*"Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body."*

Posted by: [Bill Cork](#) | [October 17, 2010 at 04:49 PM](#)

Hey you guys, Calvinism, Arminius' path. I can thank God, our compassionate Saviour did something better than these two names can "offer", if you will. "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". Now that is assurance. No, not a license to sin, but to glory in the cross, a better and higher motivation. Who is the all in vs 23? Why that was described in the verses beforehand. blessings to all of you, Jake

Posted by: [Jake](#) | [March 12, 2011 at 12:19 AM](#)

## Verify your Comment

### Previewing your Comment

Posted by: |

This is only a preview. Your comment has not yet been posted.



Your comment could not be posted. Error type:

Your comment has been posted. [Post another comment](#)

The letters and numbers you entered did not match the image. Please try again.

As a final step before posting your comment, enter the letters and numbers you see in the image below. This prevents automated programs from posting comments.

Having trouble reading this image? [View an alternate.](#)



[Contact](#)

[Archives](#)

Feeds

Powered by TypePad

Copyright © 2010 Andrews University