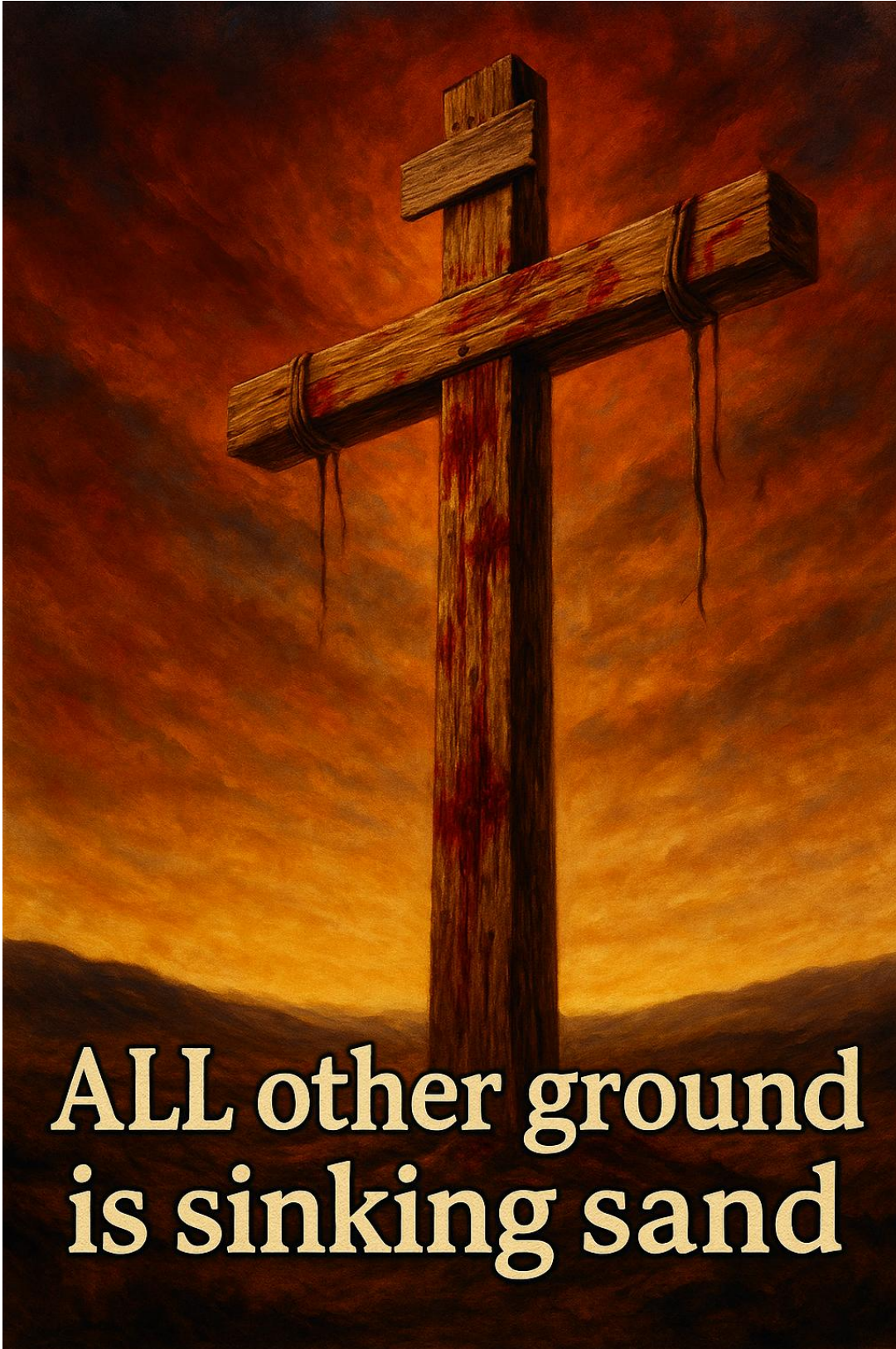


When Grace Ceases to be Grace



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Ask:

“*Why* do you believe the gospel while others reject it?”

The answer is always the same from all Arminians. It never changes:

“Because I chose. I accepted His offer. I yielded. I cooperated.”

Arminian soteriology is therefore, the doctrine of self-boasting affirmation “I...I...I”

“Any addition to either grace or Christ alone, is really a subtraction and defection – this is Paul’s point. It is never “grace + my own...” It is always grace + zero.”

When Grace Ceases to Be Grace: Why Arminianism Cannot Answer Its Own Foundational Question

Introduction: The Most Subtle Crisis in the Modern Church

There are errors in the church so blatant they are obvious to all. And there are errors so subtle, so plausible, so deeply clothed in sincerity, that they pass as gospel while carrying within them the seed of destruction.

The soteriological doctrine of Arminianism is the latter. It is not a Christological error – meaning, they are not wrong on the person of Christ. They sincerely affirm the Nicene and Apostles Creeds and the Athanasian confession. It is not a Trinitarian denial. They are orthodox in their confession of these truths. It is far more subtle...true deception always is. In the garden, the deception was framed as an insidious question – “Did God really say...?” That question introduced confusion and a misquote of God’s one command from Eve. The rest is history.

This is not said with triumph or arrogance, but with deep, profound sorrow. A sorrow born of wrestling, Scripture in hand, soul laid bare before God, until one reaches the place where the apostle Paul once stood when he wrote:

The backdrop of Galatians

“I am astonished... you are turning to another gospel.” (Galatians 1:6–7)

And again:

“Christ will profit you nothing... You are severed from Christ... You have fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:2–4)

Such truly alarming language from Paul is not reserved for atheists, cults, or moral reprobates. It is written *to* the professing church that he founded! Paul writes to those who claimed to follow Christ, believed themselves devoted to Him, and yet had unknowingly embraced a distortion that destroyed the gospel at its root. Before we address what the deception was, let’s first identify what it was not.

What Was Not “On the Table” in Galatia

A denial of the Trinity was not “on the table” in Galatia. Nor the disavowing of the divinity of Christ, nor His death and resurrection. Had this been the issue, the error would have been immediately obvious and open for everyone to see. *The deception did not openly attack Christology, it rather tampered with soteriology (the doctrine of salvation, how one is justified hence saved).* It did this tampering in subtle ways – not an open disavowing of grace, but a subtle, yet insidious add-on to it – the addition of the Law and or self-effort. Thus, Paul’s rhetorical rebuke,

“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3)

Meaning, by self-effort at obedience in any capacity. Notice, he said having begun “*by* the Spirit”. Meaning, by the supernatural activity and work of the Spirit of God in bringing them to faith and trust in Christ and His grace alone – Sola Gratia. You see, right here, Paul affirmed mongeristic salvation.

“Monergism” means accomplished *by God alone*.

Since the “Galatian heresy” was not an attack on Christology, but a subtle distortion of soteriology, we can now proceed with a clear understanding. This article wrestles with that same distortion *of soteriology* as it appears in Arminianism – both in its historic and contemporary applications.

My intent is not to attack persons, but to expose *the system* that misleads them.

Not to condemn the deceived, but to reveal the deception itself – Arminianism.

Not to exalt myself, but to magnify the sovereign grace that rescued me from it.

I. The Question Arminianism Cannot Answer

Every theological error has a point of collapse, a place where its inner logic betrays its true nature. And which if admitted or realized, the “gig is up.” A question I always press in discussion/debate with Arminians is:

Where does God’s grace end and your will begin?

The is the razor-thin edge of the issue. Press any Arminian long enough, and this fissure appears.

Ask:

“*Why* do you believe the gospel while others reject it?”

The answer is always the same from all Arminians. It never changes:

“Because *I* chose.”

“Because *I* accepted His offer.”

“Because *I* yielded.”

“Because *I* cooperated.”

Arminian soteriology is therefore, the doctrine of self-boasting affirmation “I...I...I”

Why do I say that? Because when answering the question posed above – “Why do you believe the gospel while others reject it?” no Arminian can or will say,

“Because of the grace of God alone. Period.”

Incorrect Definitions Lead To Substantial Error

By narrowly defining “grace” as the “unmerited favour” of God, or His merciful disposition toward the sinner, Arminianism dilutes the active power of grace in salvation. Grace surely includes the idea of mercy – unmerited favour, and it is in that sense a synonym to it. But it is also so much more. And it is here that the question posed above and the way every Arminian will and must answer it, reveals what I earlier called “the absolute stress point.”

“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8 – emphasis added)

As we cannot “see” the wind – but can only see, feel and hear the effects of what it does, so it is with everyone born of the Spirit, Jesus said. Not “so it is with some,” but so it is with everyone. If a person is truly “born of the Spirit” – this is how they are. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “Having begun by the Spirit.”

Galatians 3:3 and John 3:8 both speak to the identical truth.

This inability to precisely identify where grace ceases and the will begins is the very proof that Arminianism cannot explain salvation per its own system, without negating grace alone. It is not a trivial, secondary, irrelevant “straw”

that fails to see the entire basket. Certainly, to be honest, Arminianism claims it affirms “Sola Gratia” and so long as it is defined narrowly by them, this is true for them – they sincerely think they do. I want that to be underscored! I am not saying all who hold to the doctrine knowingly, intentionally deny Sola-Gratia. They will all vehemently protest “We affirm it!” And if grace is defined only as unmerited favour, they are sincere in that affirmation. What the system denies, however, is the full definition of grace in its saving-context. They deny that grace in its full definition is by itself, the sufficient cause of their understanding and faith. Thus, Arminianism in its soteriology:

Affirms the necessity of grace but denies its *sufficiency*.

Affirms the fact of the atonement but denies its decisive *efficacy*.

Affirms the reality of Christ’s work but denies the *accomplishment* of redemption...replacing it with a “potential” redemption, conditioned on the decisive element – SELF.

Rome says the same. So did the Judaizers.

Regardless of the label, or the historical specific, the principle extends to anything that does likewise. Paul called it “another gospel.”

II. The Biblical Truth: The Object of Faith Is Christ and Grace Alone

Affirming the ontological-truth of the dual nature of Christ is of course absolutely necessary. However, it is insufficient if the sufficiency of grace is denied. This is because true saving faith clings to:

A Christ who saves completely, sovereignly, monergistically, without the aid, will, or contribution of man. Who died, purposefully for the church and for them alone accomplished an actual, not merely potential redemption/atonement.

To trust Christ savingly is to trust His grace alone.

Hence, to truly affirm the “*Sola*” in “Sola Gratia.”

Let’s break this down plainly. IF “Sola Gratia” is understood and affirmed, it both means and requires the following propositions: The sinner is saved by,

His will alone

His obedience alone

His cross alone

His power in bringing them to repentant faith alone.

- There is no “His *and* their own...” here. Only *His*.

III. To “WHOM” Does the “Sola” Matter?

The “Sola” matters...*to Him* first and foremost! Because it is *His* truth even as salvation is “of the Lord” from A-Z.

And therefore, it ought to matter to all who profess faith in and seek to honor Him!

Thus, to affirm one holds to “Sola Gratia” requires that one does not dilute or diminish it, by even the most subtle additions – which are really, subtractions.

So,

Not Christ *plus* the human will.

Not Christ *plus* a decision.

Not Christ *plus* cooperation.

“In Christ ALONE, my hope is found.”

All of those contradict the “Sola” of “Sola Christus” – Christ *alone*.
All of those contradict the “Sola” of “Sola Gratia” – Grace *alone*.

Does the word “*alone*” really need to be defined? Is it not self-explanatory?

The obvious question then becomes:

How can one trust what one does not know?

How can one rest in a Christ whose saving work one denies?

How can one claim Sola Gratia in theory, while rejecting it in practice?

Answer: *One cannot. That was the entire point Paul pressed in Galatians!*

IV. Paul’s Verdict: Sincerity Does Not Save -Truth Does

The Galatians were not malicious. They were deceived. Paul did not accuse them of knowingly rejecting the only means of salvation – Christ and His enabling grace alone. Paul lamented the state of their deception.

The universal axiom of deception is that the one deceived does not know themselves to be so!

Paul, discerning the danger, writes with the urgency of a man watching souls drift toward a cliff. His terminology reflects his burden and the true nature of the impending danger. Unless grace brings them back to truth, Paul said they are and will remain:

“Bewitched.”

“Severed from Christ”

“Fallen from grace.”

To the same body of believers founded by his own ministry, Paul said that in their current state of adding the Law – which is equivalent to adding self-effort to grace alone, that;

“Christ will profit you *nothing*.”

What stunning language! What a scathing rebuke! What a horrible state to be in!
And written to the professing church!

Why such language Paul?

Because the deceived do not know they are deceived.

They still sincerely think they trust Christ.

They still speak His Name.

They still gather with His people.

They sing about Him and His grace and mercy...

A Staggering Contradiction

Yet their testimony and teaching persistently reveals the staggering contradiction to what they sing as “truth”, verses what they teach as “truth.” And this gigantic “elephant in the room” is almost never addressed or seen either from within or without. Yet this staggering contradiction remains.

Ockham’s Razor applies: If true that “*T*’was grace that taught my heart to fear,” as they passionately sing, then there would never be a “but I also had to do my part...I had to choose to accept, or believe or cooperate...” *For if grace was truly the “teacher” that so taught me, then all my positive responses are the result or effect of what grace accomplished!* Hence, Sola Gratia.

Like the deception of the Judaizers in Galatia, the Arminian system of soteriology is confused and inherently contradictory. It produces the subtle, yet insidious lie that results in one's confidence subtly shifted from Christ to themselves. This is self-evident – If I am ultimately responsible for my faith, apart from which I am not saved, then I am also responsible for its maintenance and perseverance. If I teach salvation is entirely conditioned on my response, apart from which I am not saved, then regardless of my protests to contrary – I do in fact teach salvation by self-effort or self-works!

And this is precisely the same principle Paul condemned in Galatians.

It's Really Simple

Any addition to either grace or Christ alone, is really a subtraction and defection – this is Paul's point. It is never “grace + my own...” It is always “grace + zero”

This is the historic truth summarized by the term “Sola Gratia.”

This does not mean grace comes in vain or without practical effect. Not at all, Paul said of himself,

“By the grace of God, I am what I am and His grace to me was not without effect for I worked harder than the rest – yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Do you see the obvious here? Had Paul not instantly qualified his “for I worked harder than the rest”, with “yet not I, but the grace of God with me”, it would have been an arrogant, self-righteous boast. Paul knew this which is why he immediately qualified it the way he did. Thus, everything Paul did as a saved sinner/chosen Apostle, he did “*by* the grace of God”...alone. Sola Gratia!

This is what all synergism — whether Roman, Galatian, or Arminian, denies.

V. Dort, Augustine, the Reformers — and the Weight of History

The Synod of Dort called the doctrine now known as Arminianism:

“poisonous”

“subtle”

“deadly to the comfort of the gospel”

“contrary to Scripture”

“the root of boasting”

“nothing less than the old Pelagian error, revived from hell”

In perhaps the most perceptive of their assessment and condemnation of the errors of those who hold to the same doctrine as what later came to be known as Arminianism, Dort concluded

“They turn the gospel of Christ into another law, *requiring what it cannot give.*”
(Dort, III/IV: Rejection of Errors 4)

It is this last quote that most closely aligns with Paul’s rebuke in Galatians. Any system which adds self-effort to grace alone - by the trying to keep the Law per the historical circumstance in Galatia, or the adoption of the same principle while dropping the title “the Law” but maintaining the premise, is condemned. This brings me no joy to say. God knows, I say it with a truly heavy heart - always mindful that but for the rescue of God’s mercy and enabling grace there go I. But insofar as I can honestly, reasonably discern and conclude the system that insists and persists in claiming that repentance, understanding, faith and perseverance are all produced and maintained by self - is the modern equivalent of the principle Paul condemned in Galatians.

Augustine fought the same battle. So did Calvin.

So did Owen, Edwards, Boston, and Spurgeon.

The historic Reformed Church never treated Arminianism as harmless. As merely “a difference of opinion on the minors, while we agree on the majors.”

They treated it as: *A denial of grace at its decisive point.*

Yet Dort also reflected Paul’s pastoral nuance:

Condemn *the system*.

Leave the person to God.

Because a soul may be rescued from its doctrine:

My “story”

I believed in Christ while deceived into believing that my will was the cause of that faith. Because my will was the decisive hinge on which the door of salvation opened or closed, it was also my responsibility to maintain the same by my ability to choose faith and faithfulness.

God savingly intervened and rescued me before my theology could seriously harm or worse, damn me. I say “seriously harm” referencing the sober warning of loss of reward in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. In that scenario, Paul is clear in that passage that loss of salvation itself is not in consideration, though loss of reward is. However, the language of Galatians is far more serious, urgent, alarming! And loss of salvation, not merely “reward” is the issue at stake!

VI. The Irreducible Conclusion

Arminian soteriology is a false gospel in principle *because* it makes the human will the decisive cause of salvation. And it denies, accomplished, actual redemption conditioned on God and grace alone, positing a universal, hypothetical, potential one conditioned on man's will in its place.

Per the same principle Paul so urgently argued in Galatians, an Arminian may be saved in experience only insofar as the Spirit prevents him from fully trusting the implications of his own system of doctrine. The same way that those in Galatia would be rescued from the "distortion of grace alone." And the practical evidence of it for them historically would be their rejection of the leaven of the Judaizers and indeed any subsequent add-on to grace.

To put it plainly, as the saying goes - "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, squawks like a duck, it is a duck." So, if the Spirit of God does truly prevent a person from trusting their "system", they would in fact no longer be an "Arminian".

A Gracious Distinction

If a person who labels themselves as "Arminian" does not in fact trust in themselves in any capacity – including persistently credit self for their faith, repentance or perseverance, but still adopts the language of the system due to poor teaching, or "culture" but *their heart knows the truth*, they are merely confused in their terminology. I think there is a difference between being confused terminology and deceived by the same. So, if their heart-posture before God is not that of an open, defiant, persistent "Arminian," their heart could truly function as someone committed to the truth of Sola Gratia, Sola Christus, Soli Deo Gloria. In such a scenario, God who sees the heart would see this essential distinction.

I say this to be as gracious as possible. I say this because I *want* to believe this. I say this because God made His Son the judge of all men – He did not make me

that. ALL judgment is HIS, not mine. I can challenge – even condemn a system of theology which I do. But Jesus said the Father made Him the judge of all men – so that all men will honour the Son even as the honour the Father (John 5: 23)

Being rescued from the inherent dangers of the system of Arminianism is what God did for me. I was no longer deceived by it, nor confused in my terminology. Rather, by that same rescuing grace, I became intentional in every occasion I had to frame it as “By the grace of God alone. Period.” That is my lived experience and testimony the last thirty plus years since the Lord graciously granted me true illumination – a spiritual awakening to the truth I had in ignorance and arrogance, formerly opposed. Following which, in the local assembly where I served as a Pastor, I openly – from the pulpit admitted “I was wrong. This is why...”

I lost respect from people. I lost congregants. I lost “friends”. Yet the grip of grace on me was relentlessly firm and has not let me go to this day. In 100% of my public testimony, discussion, debate, writings, posts I repudiate and disavow all of my former association with “Arminianism.” I affirm sovereign-grace alone as the all-sufficient cause of my salvation, faith, understanding and ability to persevere. It is as Paul said, “By the grace of God”...alone.

The moment a person believes he is saved because he/she chose while others refused, he has embraced the Galatian error, the boast of self as the “add on” which makes them acceptable to God while others are not. Paul says those who do so, without repentance are currently and will remain “fallen from grace,” “severed from Christ.” And adds to those so described, “Christ will profit you nothing.”

This is not harshness. It is Paul’s argument, not this author.

The specific historical occasion in Galatia was the Judaizers. The re-introduction of the Law alongside grace. The principle applies to any add-ons, however. If this were not so, then an entire book of the New Testament would

lose its practical application for most believers who are not confronted with or in any way associated with a contemporary “Judaizer.”

VII. Why This Matters And Why I Write

I do not write from a position of moral, theological, spiritual superiority. God forbid! The two earned degrees in Theology I have are meaningless in my heart before God. They may serve to help “classify” on a human, social scale. But they are irrelevant before the Lord of glory – even more so, if they are worn as a badge for self-boasting. I write from the wilderness where God broke me. Where He came and wrestled with me and *He won* the fight. And the result from that day - now more than thirty years ago, to this, is that I have walked with an obvious “limp” ever since.

I am not a man of status or renown. *I am a debtor to grace.* Period!

And because God tore me out of synergism, my heart breaks with Jacob’s limp for those still trapped in it.

I write for:

the sincere believer who does not see the danger

the zealous pastor preaching another gospel unknowingly

the confused evangelical whose words reveal misplaced trust

the soul who clings to Christ but cannot explain why

And above all: For an “audience of ONE.”

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable and pleasing in Your sight” (Psalm 19:14)

My sole desire: To exalt the Christ who truly saves, without permission, without cooperation, without assistance. The Christ who declared: “It is finished.”

VIII. The Honey and the Bitter

When Ezekiel ate the scroll, it was sweet as honey and bitter in his stomach.

So, it is with this truth.

It is sweet because grace is sovereign.

It is bitter because error is so widespread and the deceived are so sincere and passionate.

But bitter or sweet, this truth must be spoken.

Because there is only one gospel.

And only one grace.

And only one Christ who saves.

Sola Christus, Sola Gratia, Soli Deo Gloria