

# Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

14 December 2014

## Topics

### A.M. Bible Class:

Does God approve of our worship (Acts 4:23-31)?

### A.M. Lesson:

A sabbath-rest for God's people (Hebrews 4)

### P.M. Lesson:

The rainbow (Genesis 9:1-17)

### Wednesday:

Abraham justified by faith (Romans 4)

### Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-3494

### Elders

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	10:00 A.M.

***I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" Psalm 122:2***

## Labels labels labels

Neil Short

Many folks in the churches of Christ try to avoid labels. They don't like having a name for their belief systems. This attitude probably has a heritage basis of being "just Christians." We aspire to be the kind of Christians the New Testament writers preached about. If we are "just Christians" then there is no need for a name other than "church."

Rejecting labels can make for some very confusing conversations. When somebody asks my denomination and I answer "just Christian" or "I am a member of the body of Christ" the questioner has to re-frame the question over and over again until the meaning to the original question is actually answered. I find that answering the question a person *means* is better than forcing her to ask the question correctly.

Some churches have gone to great lengths to hide their "Church of Christ" affiliations—because identifying with the name is denominational and also it is a label. Again, this avoidance of labels can make for some very confusing conversations—and websites.

When somebody asks me what I believe on a particular doctrinal title, I find it is best to just admit that I lean towards a particular "-ism." Suppose somebody asks me if I am an Reformist or a Restorationist and I answer, "I follow the Bible." My answer is not very helpful and requires a major explanation on my part. The person would eventually

think, "He's a Restorationist. Why didn't he just answer my question to begin with?"

Biblical beliefs have names. It doesn't hurt me or anybody else for me to be aware of the names of my beliefs. For example, I believe baptism is the point at which a person receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). That belief has a name: Baptismal Regeneration.

The following article has some doctrinal names. Several of them are defined within the article; but two are not. *Calvinism* is a doctrinal system emphasizing predestination, the sovereignty of God, and the irresistibility of grace. Calvinists do not believe personal choice is a factor in a person's salvation. *Arminianism* is a doctrinal system emphasizing that Christ died for all people and not only for the elect. Arminians believe personal choice is critical to a person's salvation.

## Calvinism and Assurance

Jerry Walls

Calvinists often claim their theology provides a better doctrine of assurance than Arminian theology. Several years ago, I was interviewed by Modern Reformation magazine. Here is one of their questions, and here is my answer.

Q: What different kinds of comfort do you think a Calvinist and Arminian pastor would offer to a Christian who is struggling with his or her faith?

A: This is a great example of a practical issue that brings into sharp focus the profound differences

between these two theological traditions. It is a well known fact that believers in both traditions sometimes struggle with their faith and wonder about the status of their relationship with God, sometimes doubting whether they are even saved. The theological interpretation of this doubt varies considerably, however, due to the very significant differences in their theology.

To oversimplify, the Calvinist doubt can be summed up in the question “does God really love me?” whereas for the Arminian the question can be summed up, “do I really love God?” The Calvinist disquiet, which flows from the doctrine of unconditional election, is a fear that perhaps one is not really elect after all, that one is a victim of the dreaded “false hope” that Calvin warned against. The Arminian anxiety, which flows from the doctrine of conditional election, is a fear that one is not responding appropriately as God requires in terms of faith or obedience.

Now what is interesting is that both traditions have highly developed doctrines of assurance, and that both appeal to similar things to encourage wavering Christians. Both cite the promises of the gospel, both emphasize the importance of the witness of the Holy Spirit, and both urge that believers can “make their election sure” by cheerfully obeying God and walking before him with a good conscience. Part of the difficulty, of course, is that some of these factors, such as cheerful obedience and good conscience, are somewhat subjective.

In addition to these subjective considerations, believers struggling with their faith need objective grounds for assurance. Now the objective ground of our salvation is the death of Christ. But it is precisely here that important differences emerge. These differences crystallize in the Calvinist doctrine that Christ died only for the elect or, at the very least, died for the elect in a very different sense than he died for the rest of the world.

Now given that none of us can be in a position to know whether or not another person is truly elect, a Calvinist pastor cannot with good conscience assure a struggling person that Christ died for him or her without claiming to know more than his theology permits. What a struggling believer most needs to be assured of is that God loves him, that Christ died for him, that God truly desires his salvation, and that God’s grace is at work in his life. Given the Arminian view of God’s love, the Arminian counselor is able to say all of this without equivocation. A Calvinist, however, cannot say this without claiming to know more than his theology warrants.

The certainty that God loves us and Christ died for us and makes available to us the resources of His grace provides great encouragement to a believer who is struggling with his faith. It is God’s love and grace that enable us truly to believe and obey God. We love him because he first loved us, as John tells us.

The worst case scenario for the Arminian is that he has in fact lost his faith and broken his relationship with God. But even then, God still loves him and wants the relationship to be restored. For a believer who is struggling with this worst case scenario, the reminder that God loves us and by this very love empowers us not only to have faith in him but also to love him in return, is just the assurance he needs. By contrast, the worst case scenario for the Calvinist is that he is not elect after all and is the victim of a false hope. If his worst case scenario is true, there is no word of hope for him and he will be lost forever.

In short, it is far more devastating to doubt that God really loves us than to doubt that we really love God. And the doctrine of unconditional love is a far more powerful resource for helping struggling believers than is the doctrine of unconditional election.

## ***News***

Tatyana’s grandson is living in Russia. The turmoil in Ukraine has him separated from his wife and son. Tatyana’s daughter Olga is now living in one of the troubled areas of Ukraine. Please pray for their safety.

Ken Cocke is suffering from a great deal of back pain.

Tatyana Knowlton is in treatment for Macular Degeneration.

Joy Gibson is being treated for cancer.

Bryan Miller, a very close friend of Mark Cavasos, has a condition called neurofibromatosis. His treatment requires frequent surgeries.

## ***Prayer List:***

*Joy Gibson, Tatyana Knowlton,  
Ken Cocke, Janet Radar, H.L.  
Boling, Mike and Sandy Cavasos,  
Nic and Ani Self.*

