

# Calvinism, Arminianism and Eternity

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## Introduction:

"How can God have chosen me, and yet I also need to choose Him?" There are 2 major schools of Christian thought that try to reconcile this conundrum: Calvinism and Arminianism, named after two theologians who lived in the 1,500's.

Before we look at these two schools of thought, and a solution, let's look at what the Bible says about these two seemingly opposing truths.

## Verses that show that God Chooses Me:

John 15:16 NKJV - 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Ephesians 1:4-5 NKJV - 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Acts 13:48 NKJV - 48 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.

1 Peter 1:2 NKJV - 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Romans 8:28-30 NKJV - 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 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. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

2 Timothy 1:9 NKJV - 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

## Verses that show that I Must Choose God:

Deuteronomy 30:19 NKJV - 19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

Joshua 24:15 NKJV - 15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Matthew 7:13-14 NKJV - 13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

John 1:12 NKJV - 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Matthew 3:2 NKJV - 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Isaiah 55:7 NKJV - 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

Luke 13:3 NKJV - 3 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Luke 14:33 NKJV - 33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Matthew 23:37 NKJV - 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

Luke 7:30 NKJV - 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

John 10:9 NKJV - 9 "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Acts 2:38-40 NKJV - 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "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." 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

Acts 3:19 NKJV - 19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Acts 17:30 NKJV - 30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

2 Peter 1:10 NKJV - 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

Revelation 3:20 NKJV - 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

## Attempts to reconcile these two truths:

1) Calvinism says that it is all about God's choice, and that any reference to my choice is not really a choice at all - even though I may think I am choosing, I am actually not choosing at all.

They summarise their beliefs using the acronym T.U.L.I.P which stands for

**T**otal depravity - Man is so depraved he cannot choose for God without God choosing him first.

**U**ndeserved election - God has chosen some to go to heaven and others to go to hell, and he did this before they were born and with no reference to anything they could do or would do.

**L**imited atonement - Jesus died only for some people - those chosen to go to heaven, and He did not die for everyone else.

**I**rresistible grace - If you are chosen by God, you will have no option but to become saved and go to heaven; it is irresistible.

**P**erseverance of the saints - Christians cannot lose their salvation- "once saved always saved".

2) Arminianism says that God foreknew who would choose Him, and those are the ones He chose. As a result it is imperative that people choose Him in order to be saved. Their response to the TULIP points of Calvinism are as follows:

**T**otal depravity - Man is depraved, but God has given grace to all men so that they can respond to Him if they choose to do so. (Titus 2:11 NKJV - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, John 12:32 NKJV - "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.")

**U**ndeserved election - God has chosen some to go to heaven but it is based on His foreknowledge that they would choose Him.

**L**imited atonement - Arminians reject this totally, teaching that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

**I**rresistible grace - Arminians teach that humans can resist and ignore God's grace.

**P**erseverance of the saints - Arminians teach that while it is very difficult for a Christian to "fall away", it is a possibility.

## A correct Understanding of Eternity - the missing piece of the puzzle:

It is my belief that our limited understanding of eternity makes us unable to properly comprehend this seeming contradiction.

Humans are finite, and we exist in 4 dimensions - length, breadth, height and time. God, on the other hand, is infinite and "space time" (our 4 dimensions) do not apply to Him. He created all matter and time out of nothing, and it will all be destroyed one day.

In Genesis 1 we see the creation of matter, energy and time out of nothing:

Genesis 1:1-5 NKJV - 1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (**space and matter**). 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light" (**energy**); and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. (**time**)

One day the elements will all be "dissolved" away:

2 Peter 3:10-13 NKJV - 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

But what about time? Will it also cease to exist? Is that what "eternity" means?

This is where our 4 dimension brains struggle to comprehend what existence without time may be like.

### Flatland:

In 1884 Edwin Abbott wrote a book called "Flatland" in an effort to help people understand what it may be like to comprehend life in more dimensions than we can perceive.

The book describes a 2 dimensional world that has characters which are lines or shapes that have just length and breadth, but they have no third dimension - they exist in a flat world with no height, and they can't imagine, perceive or understand what height may be.

This is an illustration of how we (4 dimensional beings) may struggle to perceive the realm of God where space and time do not exist.

Imagine the flatlanders, who can only perceive their flat world, encountering a three dimensional object. Imagine that a ball were to pass through their 2 dimensional world from above. They would at first sense a dot appearing from nowhere first as the ball touched their flat plane for the first time. This dot would grow into a larger and larger circle as it passed through their world, and then the circle would start to shrink and eventually disappear as the ball exited their plane. They would be confused and could not really comprehend what had happened because they only understand 2 dimensions, and they have no concept that there may be more - other dimensions like height.

God dwells in a realm called eternity, where our normal 4 dimensions do not apply, and so it is difficult for us to grasp how He interacts with our finite world, but the Bible gives us helpful clues so we can imagine how the eternal realm intersects with our world.

## Eternity in the Bible:

When we, as finite, 4 dimensional beings, read or hear about eternity, we usually try to fit it into our understanding and our dimensional paradigm, and so we interpret eternity to mean “an extremely long time”. This is incorrect, because eternity really means a realm where there is no time... a timeless “present” without future or past. Consider these facts:

Thayers Greek Lexicon defines The Biblical Greek word for eternity, *aiōnios*, as “without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be”. This is different to our normal, human understanding of eternity as being “a very long time”

God calls Himself “I AM” (Ex 3:14) - the eternal present without time.

Every human being will be present at Judgement day, and it will happen at the end of time (Rev 20:11-13; Matt 25:31-46), and yet God says that Christians who die in Him are immediately be in His presence in heaven.

Luke 23:43 NKJV - 43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Ephesians 3:14-15 NKJV - 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

2 Corinthians 5:6, 8 NKJV - 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ... 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

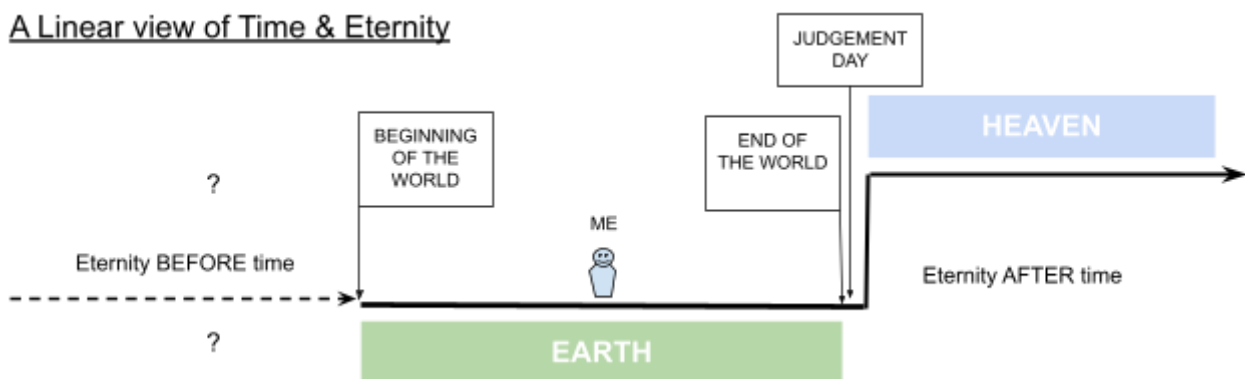
Philippians 1:23 NKJV - 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Hebrews 12:1 NKJV - 1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

How can these both be true?

If we think in terms of LINEAR time, these two facts cannot both be true... I can't be present in heaven while time on earth is still going on.

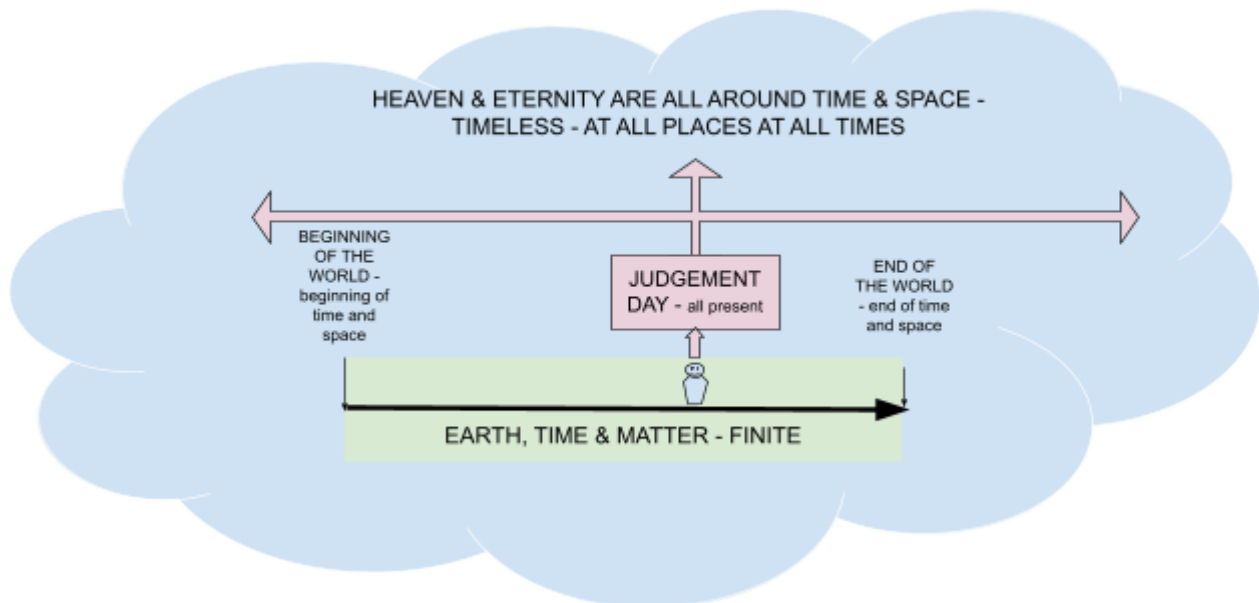
LINEAR time looks like this:



If, however, we think of Eternity as being OUTSIDE of time, these two facts can both be true... I can be present in heaven while time on earth is still going on.

ETERNITY OUTSIDE of time looks like this:

### A Non-Linear view of Time & Eternity



When I die, I am immediately in eternity and the first thing I experience is judgement day, where everyone else in all of humanity is also present, and thereafter I am in the timeless place of eternity where, from earth's perspective, I am at all times and all places at once.

Another good illustration is of a travelator, or moving walkway in an airport. Those on the walkway are limited by the speed and direction that it travels, but those outside the walkway can move backwards, forwards and at any speed, and they are not limited by it in any way.

God says that He can see the end from the beginning and vice versa - Isaiah 46:10 NKJV - 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'  
Acts 15:18 NKJV - 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works."

But He says that because we are in TIME (albeit with a sense of eternity in our hearts), we cannot see the end from the beginning like He does:

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV - He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

So, God is outside of time and when a person dies, they are also outside of time.

### Why does this matter?

The verses in the Bible about election - "who chose whom?" - cannot be understood without taking this timeless nature of eternity into account. The Bible uses words to try to describe to us what this other dimension of eternity may mean for us, but our human language and understanding make it difficult for us to grasp these meanings and so we often mistakenly fall back into linear timeline thinking. For example, when the Bible speaks of God's "Foreknowledge", we think this means He knows beforehand (we are still thinking of timelines and "before vs after"). I believe it means He knows "from eternity", in that timeless place where I already exist having lived and died on earth and made my choice to believe in Jesus. So from earth's point of view, it seems like God knew BEFORE in time, but He actually knew in eternity where there is no time. From earth's point of view, it seems like He chose me in advance, but actually there is no time so there is no "before and after" there. I choose Him while I am "in time and space", but it seems from eternity's perspective like I have always been His.

Consider this verse:

Romans 8:29-30 NKJV - 29 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. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Notice that it speaks as if a saved person has already been “glorified” (ie is already in heaven). This can only be understood if our saved status means we are in eternity where there is no linear time - no “before and after”.

There are other verses that speak of saved people on earth as if they are already in heaven:

Hebrews 12:18, 22-24 NKJV - 18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ... 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Ephesians 2:4-6 NKJV - 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV - 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The language here of a “new creation” sound very much like the description of heaven in Revelation 21:

Revelation 21:1, 4-5 NKJV - 1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ... 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NKJV - 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Luke 17:20-21 NKJV - 20 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees **when the kingdom of God would come**, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, **the kingdom of God is within you.**"

“Before time began”

There is a phrase in the Bible that the translators have struggled to translate: “Before time began”:

Titus 1:2-3 NKJV - 2 in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised **before time began**, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

2 Timothy 1:9-10 NKJV - 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus

**before time began**, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

The Greek phrase translated "Before time began" is "pro chronos aiōnios"

Pro = "before or above"

Chronos = "time"

Aionios = "eternity"

The phrase is translated in different versions as follows:

NKJV = "before time began"

KJV = "before the world began"

NIV = "before the beginning of time"

ESV = "before the ages began" with a footnote saying "before times eternal"

NASB = "**from all eternity**" and "long ages ago" with a footnote saying "before eternal times"

YLT = "before the times of the ages"

We can see from this that It is difficult for limited human brains and language to describe a dimension we cannot fully experience yet, and the phrase "Before time began" carries with it an incorrect "Linear" idea that there was time **before** time. This cannot be possible. What it is actually saying is that God chose and called us not **before** time, but rather from outside of time - in that eternal realm beyond our understanding.

A similar phrase and idea occurs in the words "before the foundation of the world" or "from the foundation of the world":

Pro = "before or above"

Katabolē = "foundation"

Kosmos = "world, universe, and all that exists"

Matthew 13:35 NKJV - 35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world."

Matthew 25:34 NKJV - 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

John 17:24 NKJV - 24 "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4 NKJV - 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Hebrews 4:3 NKJV - 3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

1 Peter 1:20 NKJV - 20 He [Jesus] indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

Revelation 13:8 NKJV - 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 17:8 NKJV - 8 "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Notice what it is saying in these verses:

- Jesus' words came from an eternal place outside of time and space

- Heaven exists in an eternal place outside of time and space
- God loves Jesus from an eternal place outside of time and space
- God chose us from an eternal place outside of time and space
- God's miracles come from an eternal place outside of time and space
- Jesus was foreordained by god from an eternal place outside of time and space
- Jesus is slain (crucified) in an eternal place outside of time and space (even though it occurred in time and space, when He left planet earth He entered that eternal place that means He is slain for all eternity and it seems like He was slain even before the world was made (although in eternity there is no "before".)
- Saved people's names are written in the "book of life" in an eternal place outside of time and space (even though it may have occurred in time and space, when we leave planet earth we enter that eternal, timeless place and that means that it seems our names were written before the world was made (although in eternity there is no "before")

## Conclusion:

Without understanding the Biblical idea of eternity, I cannot understand whether God chose me or I chose Him, because I am always thinking in terms of linear time (before and after and which came first).

In eternity there is no time and so the question is mute.

I must choose God, as the many verses in the Bible tell me to do. When I do so, I become a citizen of Heaven and of eternity, even though I am still living in time and space. When I die I enter timeless eternity where it is like I am at all times and places at once, and thus:

- It seems from an earthly perspective that God chose me BEFORE I chose Him
- It seems from a heavenly perspective that God chose me BEFORE I chose Him (although there is no "before" in heaven so a better way of saying it would be to say He chose me from "outside" of time and space rather than "before")
- A part of me (my spirit) is already in Heaven even while I am on earth, and thus the Bible can say things like,
  - "you have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem"(Heb 12:22-24)
  - "I am seated in heavenly places right now"(Eph 2:6)
  - "I am a whole new creation already"(2 Cor 5:17)
  - "He has put eternity in my heart"(Ecc 3:11)
  - "The kingdom of god is within me" (Lk 17:21)

These truths help to clarify and settle the Calvinism and Arminian debate and give us great encouragement in our faith.

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