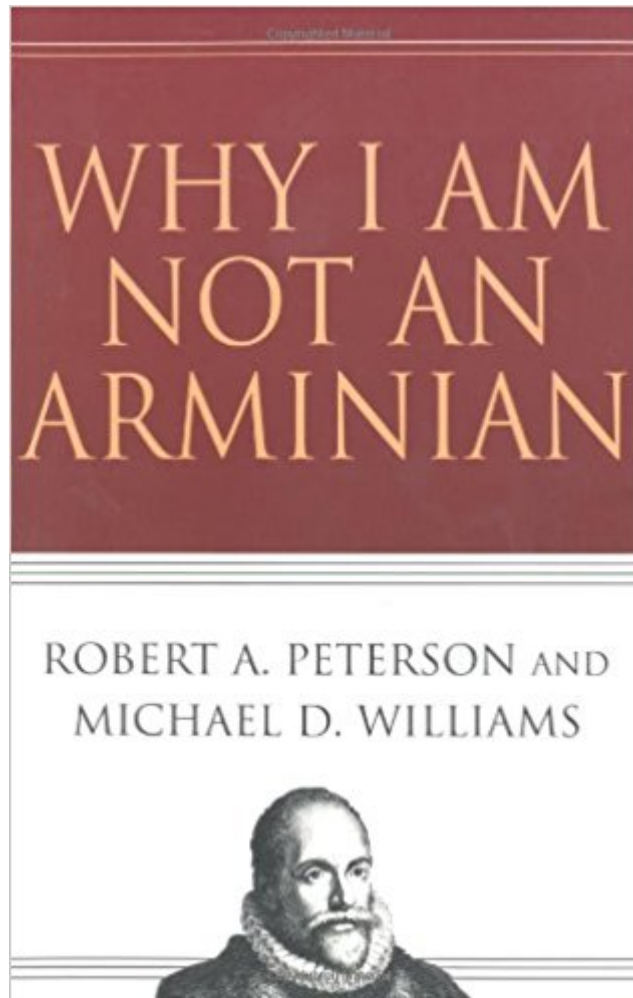




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Why I Am Not An Arminian



Synopsis

What's wrong with Arminianism? Arminian theology is sweeping through the evangelical churches of North America. While most Arminians are good, sincere, orthodox Christians, authors Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams contend that aspects of Arminian thought are troubling both biblically and theologically. In particular, they argue, Arminians have too lofty a view of human nature and an inadequate understanding of God's sovereign love in Christ. *Why I Am Not an Arminian* explores the biblical, theological and historical background to the Calvinist-Arminian debate. The irenic nature and keen insight of this book will be appreciated by laypeople, pastors and scholars alike.

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Customer Reviews

"A highly nuanced, theologically erudite work which presents Arminianism in the best possible light and then shifts the focus onto a positive construction of Calvinism to counter Arminian claims." (Myk Habets, *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*) "Very beneficial to those learning about Calvinism or Calvinists who are looking to reinforce their particular perspective. . . Very useful as a supplemental text for one studying theology. Pastors who have an interest in theology will appreciate the brevity of the book." (Larry Sterling, Jr., *Ashland Theological Journal*, 2008) "Peterson and Williams write with a grace which goes far deeper than their commendable style. The authors' Arminian conversants are fairly represented from their best literature and answered with impeccable arguments which are scripturally compelling, philosophically and historically exacting, and gracefully irenic. *Why I Am Not an Arminian* is a book that you can get your head and your heart around--and be graced!" (R. Kent

Hughes, Pastor, College Church in Wheaton, Wheaton, Illinois)"Peterson and Williams have addressed the historic debate between Calvinism and Arminianism with an irenic spirit and a zeal for truth. This is Christian scholarship at its best, characterized by biblical rigor, philosophical acumen, charitable expression and a willingness to engage opponents only after giving them a fair hearing in their own words. Not only are opponents treated fairly, so are the Scriptures. Peterson and Williams refuse to push the Bible into a box of easy answers and formula defenses. There are aspects of God's sovereignty that will remain mystery until we are face to face with him. Peterson and Williams do not shy from the mystery but embrace it as an expression of the greatness of the God who makes us his own." (Bryan Chapell, President and Professor of Practical Theology, Covenant Theological Seminary)"A quick glance at this volume's title might give someone the impression that the book is a harsh, polemical attack on Arminianism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Though clearly written from a Reformed evangelical perspective, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* is an evenhanded and careful critique of the Arminian approach to sin and salvation. To their credit, Robert Peterson and Mike Williams refuse to stack the theological deck in their favor by fairly evaluating only first-rate cases for Arminianism. After thoroughly addressing the historical context, theological concerns and biblical issues in a readable manner, Peterson and Williams show that even the best Arminian positions come up short. *Why I Am Not an Arminian* is a solid, valuable and biblically centered contribution to this never-ending discussion." (Chris Morgan, Associate Professor of Theology, California Baptist University)"Those who have been unclear about the issues separating Calvinists and Arminians will find here a carefully reasoned, understandable exposition of Calvinist theology. The authors treat their dialogue partners fairly, even compassionately, asking hard questions while avoiding triumphalism or caricature. *Why I Am Not an Arminian* will be a genuine help to anyone wanting to better understand the nature and application of salvation in Christ." (Robert A. Pyne, Th.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary)"Peterson and Williams do not fall prey to a rant against Arminianism. Their work displays an irenicism and charity that serves as a model for other authors. Even Calvinists may disagree with some of their arguments, but at the end of the day Peterson and Williams demonstrate that Calvinism is biblically grounded and Arminianism is not. This book is ideal for those who wonder what the debate between Calvinists and Arminians is all about." (Thomas R. Schreiner, Professor of New Testament, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)"I can hardly say enough in praise of this book. It is not flashy, but it is attractive. It models both clarity and charity. It does not fixate on pet Bible verses but covers seminal discussions in church history. At the same time it is Bible-centered in its presentation; it does not simply rehearse partisan opinions. In a new

millennium, the church is looking for new direction. I believe Peterson and Williams offer it with this corrective but positive exposition of the faith. They promote church unity, aid clear thinking and set forth divine teaching in constructive dialogue with human preference. Arminians, Calvinists and everyone in between are in the authors' debt." (Robert Yarbrough, Associate Professor of New Testament and New Testament Department Chair, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

Robert A. Peterson (Ph.D., Drew University) is professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He was formerly professor of New Testament and theology at Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania. His books include *Getting to Know John's Gospel: A Fresh Look at Its Main Ideas*, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (all Presbyterian & Reformed) and *Hell Under Fire* (coedited with Chris Morgan, Zondervan). He has written numerous articles, was a contributor to the second edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker) and edits Covenant Seminary's journal, *Presbyterion*. Williams is professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

A tough book to review fairly in relation to its argument as I came from an Arminian understanding of salvation to a Calvinistic one by way of similar arguments (to praise it too highly would merely be patting myself on the back!). So aside from its scriptural arguments (which, I'll admit, I do think are convincing), I appreciated this book for a few reasons. 1) It's eminently fair to their opponents. The authors identified the best thinkers on the other side and consistently engage them (to the point of mentioning when a certain author does not address a specific verse). 2) It strikes a nice balance between historical, systematic, and biblical theology. 3) They admit to weaknesses in their arguments and the existence of mystery in theology. As good Calvinists (and not Reformed Scholastics), their inclination is to affirm no more than Scripture does. I was surprised some editorial errors (i.e. Hebrew x:x instead of Hebrews x:x) in a few places. This is a solid introduction to the discussion. Now, on to its companion volume

Not as persuasive as its companion *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*.

Good companion book for *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* and *Chosen But Free* for a fairly quick, but quite comprehensive, study of the differences in viewpoints commonly held by many Christians. Many

scripture references.

Ditto, as with the other two books I purchased.

Good read. Makes you think. Does it really matter? As long as eternity with G-d is where I am going, it really does not matter what you think.

Book was in great condition--looked brand new! It was everything and more of what was advertised. Why must I add all these words??

I found some of their arguments rather lacking. I don't think it was quite as well written as "Why I am not a Calvinist".

The authors wrote in their Introduction to this 2004 book, "If we had our druthers, we would have preferred to write a biblical presentation of Calvinism, a 'Why I Am a Calvinist' book. But InterVarsity Press prevailed upon us to write under this title so that the book would complement another title: Why I Am Not a Calvinist. Thus we accept the polemical nature of the project. And as Calvinists we will put forth our argument against Arminianism. But to be honest, our true goal is commend and defend Calvinism." (Pg. 12-13) They add, "this book will focus on the theological exposition of Scripture... we will pursue our theological exposition in the context of two key events---the debate between Augustine and Pelagius in the early church and the controversy preceding the Synod of Dort in the early seventeenth century... From that starting point we will examine the Scriptures concerning two topics debated in Augustine's time and still debated today: predestination and perseverance." (Pg. 19) They acknowledge, "Arminian writers have labeled the Calvinist understanding of election arbitrary and lacking reason. But as we saw in Deuteronomy, God's choosing of Israel alone to be his covenant people is not arbitrary; it lies in his love and will. If we search for reasons behind God's love and will for why God chose Israel, we find that Scripture is silent. We must trust God's character in revealing to us what he wanted us to know and leave 'the secret things... to the LORD our God' (Deut 29:29). Beyond that it is not wise for us to inquire." (Pg. 48) They summarize: "although Arminians hold to corporate rather than individual election, the Bible teaches both. God elects individuals... God also elects corporate entities: Israel... and the church... Arminians hold that election has to do with service and not salvation. Scripture, however, presents election as having to do with both salvation... and service... Arminianism maintains that individual

election to salvation is based on foreseen faith. But that is not taught by a single passage of Scripture. Instead, Scripture denies it (Rom 9:16) and repeatedly teaches that election to salvation is based on God's sovereign will... and grace... How do people know that they are chosen for salvation? ... it is when people turn to Christian faith that they know God has chosen them for salvation." (Pg. 64-65) They admit, "We respect the godly concerns of Arminians that 'the eternal security doctrine' will lead to license. With sorrow we admit that some have indeed presumed on God's grace and used this teaching as an excuse for not repenting of their sins. But the abuse of a doctrine does not disprove that doctrine. The Bible not only plainly and repeatedly teaches preservation; it also presents the doctrine as a source of great comfort and blessing to the saints." (Pg. 89) They also concede, "We do not pretend that Calvinism provides comfortable or easy answers to every problem or question... Calvinists struggle with a sovereignty that stretches and often transcends our abilities to discern the redemptive ways of God. Why God does not save all men, we do not know... ultimately we do not know why God saves one person and not another. The elect are neither intellectually nor morally superior to their unregenerate friends and neighbors. What differentiates the elect is... solely the gracious choice of a sovereign God." (Pg. 134) They assert, "Scripture leads us to the contention that divine sovereignty... is not incompatible with true human freedom. God is not rendered idle by a world ruled by human freedom, but neither is the human being a puppet, a creature whose every thought, intention and move have been programmed by forces external to itself..." (Pg. 135) They add, "That God sovereignly superintends and controls all things and that human beings are responsible for their actions is repeatedly taught and demonstrated throughout the biblical record... Yet that sovereign agency does not annul or limit human responsibility. Conversely, human agency is affirmed. We are not automatons. Human actions are not coerced or programmed at every moment... such that we act contrary to our natures and desires. Yet this human freedom does not negate or limit God's agency... It is not a matter of either-or but of both/and." (Pg. 137) They further state, "Scripture teaches the absolute dependence of all creatures upon God. This is the biblical ground of compatibilism... we must understand what freedom means within the biblical witness to a divine sovereignty in which 'not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command.'" (Pg. 142) They elaborate, "God's sovereign action and human moral accountability are COMPATIBLE because Scripture teaches both of them, even though they seem...to call each other into question." (Pg. 149) They point out, "Now if God ordained that the crucifixion of Jesus would take place, we must say that Judas, Pilate and the others were not free in the libertarian sense of absolute power to choose the contrary. Judas could not have not betrayed Jesus. Herod and the Jews could not have chosen not to be murderous... God did not ordain the

actions of Herod or Pilate as if they were puppets. None of those involved in the death of Jesus acted contrary to their wills or in violation of their character. They did as they chose to do... Their choices were part of God's eternal play, but that fact did not remove one bit of human accountability. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility cannot be pitted against one another." (Pg. 151) They also assert, "God is sovereign even over human sin and... he had included that sin in his plan... But this should not greatly surprise us... adding God and his sovereign plan to the equation only deepens the mystery of sin and evil... Just as the Bible gives us no neat explanation for the ultimate origin of sin, it does not provide an answer to how a supremely good and holy God can sovereignly ordain the sinful acts of human beings. It simply affirms both. Sin ought not to be. It does not fit with any conception of a good and just God. Yet it is, and he is." (Pg. 159) This is a frank, clearly-stated defense of Calvinism, which will be very useful to anyone studying theology.

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