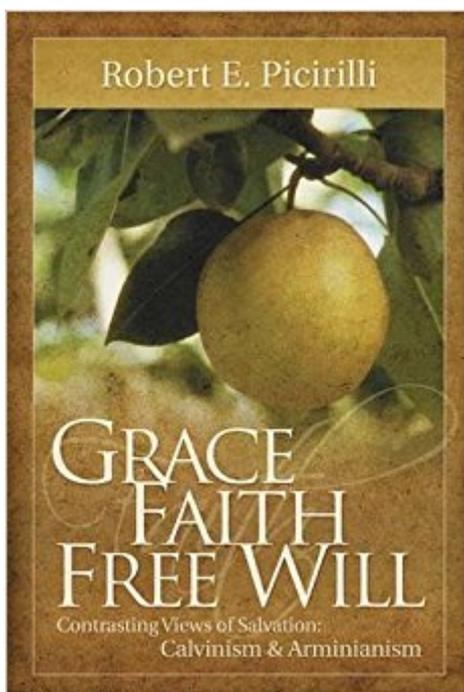


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# Grace, Faith, Free Will



## Synopsis

Grace, Faith, Free Will addresses issues that have divided Calvinists and Arminians since the Reformation. Using historical, systematic, and Biblical theology, Robert Picirilli contrasts both views of salvation. His "Reformation Arminianism" reclaims the original beliefs of Arminius and his defenders.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For anyone interested (or confused) by the theological divide between Calvinism and Arminianism, this book is a must. I grew up in Calvinist circles, but often argued Arminian positions unknowingly, simply because that seemed to be how the scriptures read. When I was accused of being "Arminian", I took it as an insult and accusation of heresy. Apparently, an Arminian was someone who denied the sovereignty of God and believed in salvation by works (which even included faith). Yet, I could not get comfortable with the doctrine of predestination, which taken to its logical conclusion makes God the author of sin. So I am abundantly grateful for Picirilli's thorough, even handed and clear presentation of the "Reformation Arminian" position, which holds a more biblical view (as opposed the Calvinists' strictly logical view) of salvation. Man is hopeless without God's grace, grace is accessed by faith alone and is available to all who would believe. Picirilli does a great job presenting both sides of the argument using whole chapters to explain the Calvinist positions with extensive references. Following chapters layout the Arminian responses, which are sometimes even followed by counter responses. While being very logical and sometimes technical, the book is

very accessible, especially for someone who has put some thought into the issues at hand. I highly recommend this book to any student of theology. You may find yourself, like me, unapologetically considering yourself an Arminian.

All of the reviews, recommendations and references by readers and authors lauding Grace, Faith, Free Will were all understated. Each page spurred me to read the next, propelling me eagerly through to the end. Grace, Faith, Free Will is engaging, insightful, and compelling. I simply had a difficult time putting the book down. My only disappointment was that there were only 236 pages. Dr. Picirilli masterfully communicates with an economy of words, yet adeptly providing ample information to grasp his conveyance of Biblical knowledge and more importantly, truth. My memory is not what it once was, therefore, I find myself highlighting more passages than in my younger days. I literally found it difficult not to highlight, because so much of the book was edifying and worthy of committing to memory. There were a few sentences that proved hard to parse and I had to read them multiple times to understand the thought being communicated. I chalked this up to regional or generational differences in language or plainly my ignorance. Picirilli quotes Alan P. F. Sell, "In important respects, Arminius was not an Arminian."<sup>(1)</sup> Conversely, John Calvin was not a Calvinist, as Michael Horton points out, "Luther wanted to be known as an evangelical -- 'of the gospel.' He recoiled at hearing his Roman Catholic critics call evangelicals 'Lutherans.' Similarly, Calvin expressed disapproval when his Lutheran critics saddled Reformed evangelicals with the nickname 'Calvinists.'"<sup>(2)</sup> The point being, neither Calvin nor Arminius was proclaiming a brand, rather, they were exegetes trying to rightly divide and expound the word of God. Let us not get caught up in the game of us against them, and lose sight of knowing and understanding the truth that sets us free. Picirilli writes, "...I once heard Dr. Roger Nicole observe that we should make sure we can state an opponent's position in such a way that he will agree that we have expressed it correctly. I think he is right, and I have made a conscientious attempt to do that. It does no good to argue against another view if you have first misrepresented it. Straw men go down all too easily."<sup>(3)</sup> Furthermore, Picirilli writes, "If one is to understand any theologian's views about predestination, he must first consider that theologian's basic assumptions about the nature of God, man, and salvation."<sup>(4)</sup> I was excited to find that chapter 12, Arminianism and Conditional Perseverance, and Chapter 13, Hebrews, Second Peter, and the Possibility of Apostasy, address the potential for a believer to forfeit salvation. In the several books I have read, none address this issue as thoroughly. In chapter 1, Picirilli writes, "In the Declaration of Sentiments, after countering the Calvinists' views, Arminius proceeded to set forth his own: in essence, that God's decree of election was to save

those sinners who repent and believe in Christ. The decree to save and damn particular persons was based on God's foreknowledge of their faith or unbelief. On the matter of perseverance--which had not been so crucial an issue as predestination--Arminius was cautious: 'I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith and perish, yet I will not conceal that there are passages of Scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect.' He concluded with another appeal for a national synod, one that would be open to the possibility of revisions in the confessions." (5)I cannot adequately describe how skillfully, precisely, and succinctly Dr. Picirilli writes. During the course of perusing *Grace, Faith, Free Will* for this review, I found myself struggling to provide samplings of his writing to entice potential readers to purchase and read this excellent book. There simply is a tremendous amount of information considering the total pages in this book. It has only been a few weeks since I read this book and I find myself wanting to read it again, but this time with a more robust study. The appendices, especially the Index of Selected Subjects and Index of Citations from Other Authors, are very telling. Seeing the frequency of subjects discussed as well as the prevalence of citations attributed to cited authors in the book, provides additional insight about the author. There are few books that warrant five stars. I have given this book, *Grace Faith, Free Will* four stars; nonetheless, this is an exceptional work that in my estimation teeters on the precipice between four and five stars. I enthusiastically recommend this book to fellow Arminians and Calvinist/Reformed brethren, or anyone who has ever been or find themselves in a quandary about Grace, Faith, and Free Will.-----1.

Sell, Alan P.F., "The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation" Grand Rapids, Baker, 1983, 972. Horton, Michael, "For Calvinism" Grand Rapids, Baker 2011, 193. Picirilli, Robert E., "Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism" Nashville, Randall House, 2002, iii4. Picirilli, Robert E., "Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism" Nashville, Randall House, 2002, 215. Picirilli, Robert E., "Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism" Nashville, Randall House, 2002, 11-12

I have struggled with the Arminian/Calvinist debate for a couple of years now. I grew up in a Wesleyan-Arminian church and it was not until I was an adult that I really heard the two theologies juxtaposed and really understood what they believed. I was still firmly Arminian though. A few years later my husband and I started attending a Baptist church and in a Bible study was presented with Calvinism by a 5-point Calvinist, a man that I respected and knew to be a Bible scholar(still respect him.) Unfortunately, he really confused me, to the point where my relationship with Christ suffered

greatly, not that I am blaming him at all. I am no Bible scholar and so when he presented his belief in what the scripture said it was very convincing. Finally, I decided to study this on my own and hopefully feel confidence on one side or the other. I came across this book and it has helped me so much and allowed me to feel more confident in what I feel scripture has to say about election and the other debated points of these two theologies. I am thankful for Mr. Picirilli's book as it is very clear and concise and offers scripture to support his points. There were only a few passages that I felt were a little over my head and I had to reread them. Again, I am no Bible scholar, I am just a Christian earnestly seeking the face of God. This book has brought me a little further along in that journey. I recommend this book, especially to anyone who may be in the same place I was in not too long ago.

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