

## The chief difference between Reformed theology and Lutheran theology

Christians of [Reformed](#) heritage, including Arminians as well as Calvinists, obviously differ from Lutherans on [sacramentology](#). More foundationally, to the extent that they maintain their distinctive teachings, they disagree on exactly what gospel (good news) the apostles proclaimed:

<i>What is the gospel?</i>	<b>Arminianism</b>	<b>Calvinism</b>	<b>Lutheranism</b>
<b>The good news says Christ died for the sins of all people</b> 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 1 John 2:2	✓		✓
<b>The good news says all for whom Christ died have already been reconciled to God</b> 2 Corinthians 5:18-19		✓	✓
<b>The good news promises all who hear it, “Your sins are forgiven!”</b> Mark 2:5,9; Luke 5:20; 7:48; John 20:21-23*			✓

According to consistent Arminians, even though the atonement is universal, the gospel in itself does not tell you that you are forgiven; rather, they hold that you will be forgiven only if you make the right decision by your free will. Consistent Calvinists agree that the gospel in itself does not absolve; rather, in spite of their affirmation of the efficacy of the atonement, they say you also need some subjective evidence that you are among the elect for whom Christ died. In either case, something about you must be added to the good news before you can know your sins are forgiven.

By contrast, [the Lutheran Church](#) stresses both the universality and the efficacy of the atonement, empowering her to announce the gospel that itself unconditionally promises the forgiveness of sins. All who believe that *truly* good news enjoy salvation (Romans 1:16).

### Further explanation and Scriptural support

- [“Objective justification: God in Christ reconciled the world, not imputing their sins against them”](#) (PDF)
- [“Calvinistic modification of justification by faith alone: Does God save all who believe the good news of Christ crucified?”](#) (PDF)
- [The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel](#) (by C. F. W. Walther); excerpt: “...the sects teach false doctrine concerning the Gospel. They regard it as nothing else than an instruction for man, teaching him what he must do to secure the grace of God, while in reality the Gospel is God’s proclamation to men: ‘Ye are redeemed from your sins; ye are reconciled to God; your sins are forgiven.’ No sectarian preacher dare make this frank statement.” (Lecture 14)

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\*Withholding forgiveness is not good news, but a threat of the law that makes the gospel seem relevant.