

# Understanding and Answering Calvinism

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources, including *The History of Calvinism* by Jeff Smith, 2004)

## Introduction:

- A. Bible rules for Bible study:
  - 1. Pray for wisdom, understanding, a humble heart, and an open mind.
  - 2. Use the Bible as the final authority in doctrinal matters.
  - 3. Approach study without preconceived answers.
  - 4. Accept all of the teaching that is revealed on any given subject.
  - 5. Maintain the purity of the context.
  - 6. NO Bible text will contradict any other Bible text. If a conflict appears to exist, the conflict originated with the reader's understanding of one or both of the texts.
  - 7. Re-examine your conclusions.
- B. Sectarian rules for Bible study:
  - 1. Use the works of John Calvin to influence your understanding of Bible.
  - 2. Approach Bible study with the conviction that you were born in sin and predestined to be saved or lost.
  - 3. Accept only the Bible teachings that confirm what you already believe.
  - 4. If there appears to be a conflict between scripture and Calvin, then Calvin must be acknowledged as the greater authority.
- C. What is the difference between Calvinism and New Testament Christianity that makes them so antithetical to each other?
  - 1. The New Testament is predicated on the premise that God has created humankind as a free-will, moral creature made in His image, whose nature has not changed since Creation.
    - a. Human beings, though sinners by choice, have the ability to understand the word of God and respond in faith to God's grace.
    - b. Faithful obedience is blessed by saving grace (Eph. 2:8-9) and righteousness is imputed to human beings as a result.
  - 2. Calvinism rejects humankind's ability to believe and obey, since it declares that everyone is born in total depravity,
    - a. Everyone is totally passive; God must do everything in salvation.
    - b. Sinners cannot read and understand the Bible without supernatural help from the Holy Spirit, while grace saves, doctrine sanctifies.
    - c. Election is unconditional and justification is by faith alone, with faith being a gift by God to the elect only.
    - d. The saved cannot be lost.
  - 3. The two systems of religion are incompatible and irreconcilable.
- D. The five facets of Calvinism are formed into an acronym, TULIP, designating:
  - 1. Total hereditary depravity
  - 2. Unconditional election
  - 3. Limited atonement
  - 4. Irresistible grace
  - 5. Perseverance of saints

## I. THE ORIGIN OF CALVINISM

- A. The earliest beginnings of the erring doctrines that led to Calvinism did not develop until about 380 years after the Gospel was first preached.
- B. Pelagius and Augustine were two of the first figures in early Christianity to debate the nature of the human will after the fall of Adam and Eve and the nature of the grace in 411 AD.
  1. Pelagius argued that the sin of Adam, called original sin, was in no way passed down or imputed to the rest of the human race. Adam and Eve simply provided a bad example that was followed by all of their offspring. Because of this belief, Pelagius believed that grace simply helped humans to know what to do to live holy lives and that humans were completely capable of following these commands. His views went to the extreme that grace is not necessary for salvation and obedience.
  2. Augustine argued that the sin of Adam infected the will of every human who followed, rendering them incapable of following God's commands or loving God. Because of this, the grace of God empowers the will making it capable of loving and obeying God.
  3. The Catholic church debated for hundreds of years and in the end affirmed "semi-pelagianism," the belief that man has free will but God is the source of faith.
- B. Calvinism finds its origin in 1536 when John Calvin, a native Frenchman, established his theology in Geneva, Switzerland, with his work "The Institutes of Christian Religion."
  1. It was predicated on a belief that God has already determined the fate of every man, and therefore that God's grace alone saved men. This reversal of some of the tenets of the Roman Catholic church was accepted by many.
  2. John Knox, a disciple of Calvin, took Calvinism to Scotland, where the Presbyterian church was founded in the 1570s.
  3. In the seventeenth century, Calvinism took root in England in the form of Puritanism, which then took root in America. Today's Congregational church (also referred to as the United Church of Christ) is the descendent of the Puritans.
  4. Calvin's message was also taken to the area of the Netherlands in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century which led to the formation of the Reformed Church.
- C. Calvinism is a protest against Catholicism's great failing: the attempt to earn heaven by a system of meritorious works.
  1. With Luther and Calvin, however, the pendulum swung violently to the other, equally erring, extreme. That by predestination and faith alone is one saved and forever assured of heaven.
  2. Elements of this erring doctrine have been adopted by most mainstream Protestant denominations.
  3. The truth is not at the extremes of human doctrines, nor is it in the golden mean between the two; it is in the Bible where God put the truth about grace and faith and obedience.

4. The Lord's Church is neither Catholic nor Protestant; its members do not follow any man, whether pope or protester.

## II. ANSWERING CALVINISM

### A. Total Hereditary Depravity

1. This is the beginning place for Calvinism. It asserts that everyone inherits the sin and condemnation of Adam at birth.
2. The Baptist creed is especially insistent upon the sinfulness of each baby: "The guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve was imputed and corrupt nature conveyed to all their posterity whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil." (*The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*)
3. Calvinists misuse a few passages as proof that God holds us accountable for the sins of ancestors. Isa. 64:6; Rom. 5:12; Psalm 51:5
4. Answered by:
  - a. Ez. 18:20 - The son will not bear the iniquity of his father.
  - b. 1Peter 1:18-19 says that men are bought back from sin by Jesus, but if man is born in sin, he cannot come back to where he has never been.
  - c. Titus 3:5 shows man's regeneration, proving he had been in the favor of God before he sinned.

### B. Unconditional Election (Predestination)

1. Calvin takes a Bible word and redefines it to fit his doctrine.
2. The Baptist manual teaches that "By the decree of God...some men and angels are predestined or foreordained to eternal life...others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation. No man can change his fate for God chooses those to whom He bestows His grace and love."
3. What is the state of those whom God created just to destroy?
  - a. If this is true, then God is responsible for humankind's sin and condemnation.
  - b. God has also become a respecter of persons.
4. The Calvinistic theory of predestination is unbiblical.
  - a. First, there are some things that God chose not to know Abraham's faithfulness in offering Isaac (Gen. 22:12) and Judah's idolatry with Molech (Jer. 19:5).
  - b. Second, there are some matters about which God changed His mind. Nations were rebuked and could repent to prevent God's judgment on them (Jer. 18:7-10, Ez. 2:17-21). Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching and was spared as God changed His plan.
  - c. Third, some of God's decrees were changeable as well. Hezekiah was given 15 extra years of life after God told him that he would die, and he prayed about it (2Kings 20:1-6).
5. Predestination is a Bible word, and a Bible definition will supersede Calvin's warped use of the word.
  - a. In Ephesians 1:4-11, the word is used twice, but only refers to God's foreknown plan to save the penitent in Christ.

- b. Romans 8:29-30 describes the predestined as those called to be conformed to Christ. But we are called by the Gospel and justified by adhering to it by choice, not by the overwhelming will of another (Acts 10:34; 2Thes. 2:13-14).
- c. Exodus 20:13-16 and Israel's history show that we are capable of choosing right or wrong.
- d. Matt. 11:28-30 proves we are capable of learning what is right.
- e. James 1:13-15 put the burden of guilt on us for choosing sin, not on God for foreordaining it.

#### C. Limited Atonement

1. The limitation of Christ's sacrifice is an ersatz doctrine. Calvin teaches that access to the blood of Christ is denied to those whom God chose to torment before ever taking a breath. Calvin taught that Jesus did not die for everyone but just for those certain individuals whom God respected and predestined to save.
2. Misused passages used to prove that Christ's sacrifice is limited to the Calvinistic elect: Acts 13:48; Heb. 9:15
  - a. Remember: NO Bible text will contradict any other Bible text. If a conflict appears to exist, the conflict originated with the reader's understanding of one or both of the texts.
  - b. Calvinism has reversed the scriptural order of these texts.
3. The Great Commission was to broadcast the Gospel to every creature in the world, because whoever believes can be saved - John 3:16
  - a. Jesus died so that all have access to His sacrifice.
  - b. 1Tim. 2:3-6; Heb. 2:9; 2Peter 3:9.
  - c. If Christ did not die to give all people access to salvation, then He and God were disingenuous in Their offer of salvation, and are respecters of persons, arbitrarily selecting certain people to be saved while others are to be tortured forever.

#### D. Irresistible Grace

1. Calvin teaches that humans are so evil that it takes a miracle to save them. Though it the Adversary does not need to use a miracle to enslave us in sin, God must resort to the supernatural to get us back. This makes the lies of Satan more powerful than the truths of God.
2. Calvin teaches that the Holy Spirit must operate directly on our hearts to make us believe and obey, apart from the word of God.
3. However, the Bible says that the Spirit uses the word to convert sinners (Eph. 6:17) and proves it throughout the book of Acts.
4. The Spirit works, not by forcibly invading our hearts, but by influencing our souls through the Gospel message inspired by the Spirit.
  - 1) Rom. 1:16-17; 2Thes. 2:13-14; 1Cor. 4:15, 15:1-4; James 1:18, 21; 1Peter 1:14-25
5. Calvinists teach that the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but Stephen disagreed - Acts 7:51

#### E. Perseverance of the Saints (Once Saved, Always Saved)

1. Calvin taught that once a man was saved, he could never sin so as to be lost again.
2. "A child of God can go from the arms of a harlot to the arms of Jesus." (Baptist Minister Sam Morris)
3. "If I killed my wife and mother and debauched a thousand women, I couldn't go to hell—in fact, I couldn't go to hell if I wanted to. If on the judgment day, I should find that my loved ones are lost and should lose desire to be saved, and should beg God to send me to hell with them, He couldn't do it." (Bill Foster, *The Weekly Worker*, March 12, 1959)
4. The New Testament teaches that Christians have eternal life in hope (Titus 1:2, 3:7) and in promise (1John 2:25).
  - a. One can leave the faith and forfeit his hope - 1Tim. 4:1, 2Tim. 2:18; 1Tim. 5:12, 1:19-20
  - b. Although Romans 8:35-39 teaches that nothing can separate man from Christ's love, it does not prove that nothing can separate man from Christ and salvation. The Bible says that one can fall away from grace (Heb. 12:15). One cannot fall from grace, if he were not in grace in the first place.
  - c. Concerning John 10:27-29, it is true that no one can pluck a sheep from God's hand, but it is equally true that a sheep can wander away - Matt. 18:6, 12. One cannot stray from the flock, if he was never in the flock in the first place.
  - d. Paul warned that he could be disqualified if he fell into sin (1Cor. 9:27) and that some had already turned after Satan (1Tim. 5:15).
  - e. Peter rebuked Christians who had gone back to the world, leaving Christ for their old sins - 2Peter 2:14-25
  - f. One cannot leave Christ, if he were not in Christ in the first place. Thus, the saved can so sin as to be lost.
5. Eternal security is conditional, as the Bible clearly teaches when it attaches the word "if" to salvation.
  - a. We are disciples of Jesus, if we keep His word - John 8:31
  - b. We are saved, if we remember the truth - 1Cor. 15:1-2
  - c. We are reconciled, if we continue in the faith - Col. 1:21-23
  - d. We are kept from falling, if we obey - 2Peter 1:10
  - e. We are saved, if we walk in the light - 1John 1:7

if

#### Conclusion:

- A. Calvinism is false and dangerous. Most professed or nominal Christians in the world have been lulled into false security by its tenets that cast off personal responsibility and make blurred distinctions between right and wrong. Calvinism places all responsibility for sin and condemnation on God.
- B. Bible truth is salvation by grace through faith reconciled with faith working through love. Therein is true New Testament Christianity.