

# The Calvinism Debate

Updated January 27, 2009 (first published December 12, 2001) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/calvinismdebate.html>).

Calvinism is a theology that was developed by John Calvin (1509-64) in the sixteenth century. He presented this theology in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, which subsequently became the cornerstone of *Presbyterian* and *Reformed* theology. It is also called TULIP theology. Calvin himself did not use the term TULIP to describe his theology, but it is an accurate, though simplified, representation of his views, and every standard point of TULIP theology can be found in Calvin's *Institutes*.

Calvinistic theology was summarized into five points during the debate over the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, but he rejected Calvinism and taught his non-Calvinist theology in Holland. Arminius' followers arranged his teaching under the following five points and began to distribute this theology among the Dutch churches in 1610: (1) Free will, or human ability, (2) Conditional election, (3) Universal Redemption, or General Atonement, (4) Resistible Grace, and (5) Insecure Faith. These points were rejected at the state-church Synod of Dort in Holland in 1618-1619 (attended as well by representatives from France, Germany, Switzerland, and Britain), and this Synod formulated the "five points of Calvinism" in resistance to Arminianism. Arminius' followers were thereafter put out of their churches and persecuted by their Calvinist brethren.

In the late 18th century, the five points of Calvinism were rearranged under the acronym TULIP as a memory aid.

## ***A SUMMARY OF TULIP THEOLOGY***

**Total Depravity:** Man is totally corrupt and dead in his sin so that he cannot even respond to the gospel unless God sovereignly enables him, which only happens if he is one of the elect. God not only must enable the dead sinner, but must sovereignly regenerate him and give him the gift of faith. In the words of the Westminster Confession Total Depravity is defined as follows: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."

The Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity does not mean merely that the sinner has no righteousness of his own or that his heart is depraved. It means also that his will is in bondage to sin in such a fashion that he is unable to believe the gospel. Further, it means that he must therefore be born again before he can believe. Arthur Pink states this doctrine as follows: "Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. ... Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead--'dead in trespasses and sins'--then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything" (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 73).

**Unconditional Election:** God unconditionally and "sovereignly" elects who will be saved and this election has nothing to do with anything the sinner does, including exercising faith in the gospel. Consider the words of the Westminster Confession: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. ... The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice." John Calvin expressed the doctrine of unconditional election in these words: "Predestination we call the decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a

similar destiny: but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 21). Calvin emphasized his belief in sovereign reprobation as follows: “[God] devotes to destruction whom he pleases ... they are predestinated to eternal death without any demerit of their own, merely by his sovereign will. ... he orders all things by his counsel and decree in such a manner, that some men are born devoted from the womb to certain death, that his name be glorified in their destruction. ... God chooses whom he will as his children ... while he rejects and reprobates others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 23).

**Limited Atonement:** The death of Christ was only for those God has sovereignly elected. Calvin denounced the universal offer of the Gospel. “When it appears that when the doctrine of salvation is offered to all for their effectual benefit, it is a corrupt prostitution of that which is declared to be reserved particularly for the children of the church” (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22).

**Irresistible Grace:** God’s call to the elect is effectual and cannot be resisted. The dead sinner is sovereignly regenerated and granted the “gift of faith.” “That some, in time, have faith given them by God, and others have it not given, proceeds from his eternal decree; for ‘known unto God are all his works from the beginning,’ etc. (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). According to which decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however hard, and he bends them to believe; but the non-elect he leaves, in his judgment, to their own perversity and hardness” (summary derived from the Synod of Dort). The Westminster Confession adds the following: “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved...”

**Perseverance of the Saints:** Those who are sovereignly elected and regenerated will continue in the faith. “Those whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end; and though they may fall through neglect and temptation, into sin, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the Church, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be renewed again unto repentance, and be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (Abstract of Principles, 1858).

## **SOME INTRODUCTORY POINTS**

### ***1. I HAVE STUDIED CALVINISM FROM “THE HORSE’S MOUTH.”***

In order to gain a proper understanding of Calvinism, I have studied the writings of many influential Calvinists, both contemporary and past. I have examined Calvinism many times during the 32 years since I was saved. The first time was shortly after I was converted, when I was in Bible College, and Calvinism was one of the many topics that were strenuously discussed by the students. I had never heard of Calvinism before that and I didn’t know what to think of it, so I read Arthur Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God* and a couple of other titles on the subject with a desire to understand it and to know whether it was scriptural or not. Some of the students became Calvinists, but I concluded that though Calvinism makes some good points about the sovereignty of God and though I personally like the way it exalts God above man and though I agree with its teaching that salvation is 100% of God and though I despise and reject the shallow, manipulative, man-centered soul winning scheme that is so common among independent Baptists and though it does seem to be supported by a few Scriptures, the bottom line to me is that it ends up contradicting far too many plain Scriptures.

In the year 2000 I was invited to preach at a conference on Calvinism at Heritage Baptist University in Greenwood, Indiana, that was subsequently held in April of 2001. The conference was opposed to Calvinism; and I agreed to speak, because I have been in sympathy with such a position ever since I first examined the subject in Bible College. Before I put together a message for the conference, though, I wanted to re-examine Calvinism in a more thorough manner. I contacted Dr. Peter Masters in London, England, and discussed the subject of Calvinism with him. I told him that I love and respect him in Christ and I also love and respect his predecessor, Charles Spurgeon, though I do not agree with either of them on Calvinism (or on some other issues, in fact). I told Dr. Masters that I

wanted him to tell me what books he would recommend so that I could properly understand what he believes on the subject (knowing that there are many varieties of Calvinism). I did not want to misrepresent anything. Among other things, Dr. Masters recommended that I read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and Iain Murray's *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper-Calvinists*, which I did.

In the last couple of years I have re-investigated Calvinism from both sides. I read Dave Hunt's "What Love Is This?" and "A Calvinist's Honest Doubts Resolved by Reason and God's Amazing Grace." I read "Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views" by Dave Hunt and James White. I carefully re-read Arthur Pink's "The Sovereignty of God" as well as the "Westminster Confession of Faith." I have also studied about 100 pages of materials published in defense of Calvinism by the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore. This is a Bible Presbyterian school.

As best as I know how, I have studied these materials with the sole desire to know the truth and with a willingness to follow the truth wherever it leads.

Thus, while I have not read every book on this subject that could be recommended by my readers, I have made a considerable effort to understand Calvinism properly and not to misrepresent it (though I have learned that a non-Calvinist will ALWAYS be charged with misrepresentation).

## **2. BAPTISTS MUST FACE THE ISSUE OF CALVINISM.**

It is a divisive subject, but it must be faced because it touches some of the most important points of biblical truth and affects how Christians perceive of the gospel and the very person of God. It is interesting to observe that there have always been divisions among Baptists on the issue of Calvinism. The early Baptists in England were divided into the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, referring to how they viewed Christ's atonement, as to whether it was for all men (general) or only for the elect (particular). Adam Taylor's *History of the General Baptists of England* (1818) deals with the history of the non-Calvinist Baptists in Great Britain, and there were a large number of them. To my knowledge, Taylor is the only 19th-century British Baptist historian who was not a Calvinist. It is certain that the vast majority of Baptist histories are written by Calvinists and they typically neglect and sometimes misreport the history and beliefs of the non-Calvinist Baptists. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Baptists have always been divided on this issue and it is not wise to draw back from dealing with it today, even though divisions are certainly the result.

## **3. FEW THINGS HAVE HINDERED BIBLICAL EVANGELISM MORE THAN CALVINISM.**

It almost killed the evangelistic zeal of the Baptist churches of England in the 18th century and well into the 19th. Among Calvinists, evangelism is done IN SPITE OF Calvinism, not because of it. Baptist historian Thomas Armitage wrote: "William Carey's 'Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen' was published in 1792, but found few readers and produced little effect. To most of the Baptists his views were visionary and even wild, in open conflict with God's sovereignty. At a meeting of ministers, where the senior Ryland presided, Carey proposed that at the next meeting they discuss the duty of attempting to spread the Gospel amongst the heathen. ... Ryland, shocked, sprang to his feet and ordered Carey to sit down, saying: 'When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine!'"

Things were not much better when Spurgeon took his first pastorate in 1854. This situation is described in *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper Calvinists* by Iain Murray. Many Calvinists opposed Spurgeon and denounced his broad, indiscriminate invitations for sinners to come to Christ. For example, one Calvinist publication warned in Spurgeon's day, "...to preach that it is man's duty to believe savingly in Christ is ABSURD" (*Earthen Vessel*, 1857).

## **4. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT CALVINISM IS AN UNSETTLED THEOLOGY.**

Calvinists are seriously divided among themselves and always have been. There is Supralapsarianism vs. Sublapsarianism vs. Infralapsarianism. "The Supralapsarians hold that God decreed the fall of Adam; the Sublapsarians, that he permitted it" (McClintock & Strong). The Calvinists at the Synod of Dort were divided on many issues, including lapsarianism. The Swiss Calvinists who wrote the Helvetic Consensus Formula in 1675 were in conflict with the French Calvinists of the School of Saumur. There are Strict Calvinists and Moderate Calvinists, Hyper and non-Hyper (differing

especially on reprobation and the extent of the atonement and whether God loves all men), 5 pointers, 4 pointers, 3 pointers, 2 pointers. In America Calvinists were divided into Old School and the New School. As we have seen, the Calvinists of England were divided in the 19th century.

Whenever, therefore, one tries to state TULIP theology and then refute it, there are Calvinists who will argue with you that you are misrepresenting Calvinism. It is not so much that you are misrepresenting Calvinism, though. You might be quoting directly from various Calvinists or even from Calvin himself. The problem is that you are misrepresenting *THEIR* Calvinism! There are Calvin Calvinists and Andrew Fuller Calvinists and Arthur W. Pink Calvinists and Presbyterian Calvinists and Baptist Calvinists and many other sorts of Calvinists. Many Calvinists have never read Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion* for themselves. They are merely following someone who follows someone who allegedly follows Calvin (who, by his own admission, followed Augustine).

Calvinists believe that they have the right to reject or modify some parts of, or conclusions of Calvin. I agree with them 100%, and I say, further, that *we also have the right to reject the entire thing* if we are convinced that it is not supported by Scripture!

### ***5. IT IS NOT WISE TO FOLLOW JOHN CALVIN; HE WAS UNSOUND AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.***

Calvin never gave a testimony of the new birth; rather he identified with his Catholic infant baptism. Note the following quotes from his *Institutes*:

“At whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life” (*Institutes*, IV).

“By baptism we are ingrafted into the body of Christ ... infants are to be baptized ... children of Christians, as they are immediately on their birth received by God as heirs of the covenant, are also to be admitted to baptism” (*Institutes*, IV).

Calvin was vicious toward his enemies, acting more like a devouring wolf than a harmless sheep. Historian William Jones observed that “that most hateful feature of popery adhered to Calvin through life, the spirit of persecution.” Note how he described his theological opponents: “...all that filth and villainy...mad dogs who vomit their filth against the majesty of God and want to pervert all religion. Must they be spared?” (Oct. 16, 1555). Calvin hated the Anabaptists, though they were miles closer to the Scriptural pattern for the New Testament church than he was. He called them “henchmen of Satan.” Four men who disagreed with Calvin on who should be admitted to the Lord's Supper were beheaded, quartered, and their body parts hung in strategic locations in Geneva as a warning to others. He burned Michael Servetus (for rejecting infant baptism and for denying Christ's deity). Calvin wrote about Servetus, “One should not be content with simply killing such people, but should burn them cruelly.”

### ***6. GOD DOES NOT REQUIRE HIS PEOPLE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM!***

I am convinced that John Calvin has caused great and unnecessary divisions among God's people because of dogmatizing his philosophizing about God's sovereignty and election. If men were left simply to believe the Bible's own statements on these matters and if men were not forced to decide between the man-made theologies called “Calvinism” and “Arminianism,” the Christian world would be much better off and many artificial and unnecessary divisions would not have resulted.

The Bible says “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bible itself is the test of truth, not some man's systematic theology. I have the right and responsibility to test every theology by the Bible, and I am free before the Lord to reject any part of it or all of it. I do not have to make a choice between human theologies. I can stand strictly and exclusively upon the Bible itself, the SOLE authority for faith and practice. Many Calvinists won't allow that, though. James White, author of “The Truth about the King James Bible Controversy” and “The Potter's Freedom” and several other books, wrote to me in about the year 1999 and challenged me to a public debate. He urged me to “defend Arminianism.” That is a strange notion, because I don't follow Arminianism and I don't care anything about Arminianism. I have studied the theology of James Arminius some and I find errors in it just as I have found errors in John Calvin's theology. Though I

do believe that Arminius was closer to the truth than Calvin, this does not mean that I have any intention to “defend Arminianism.” White has the idea that is so typical among Calvinists that if a man is not a Calvinist, he is surely an Arminian.

This idea actually began with Calvin. He treated those who disagreed with his position on election as enemies of God and the gospel and would not admit that men can reject Calvinism and still believe God’s Word! From the time that I was saved by God’s marvelous and free grace 32 years ago until this very day, I have wanted to understand the will of and to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ through God’s preserved Word, the Scriptures. As best as I know how, I have made that my sole authority. I enjoy systematic theology; I have taught a course in Bible doctrine in a new Bible college that helped establish in South Asia and have published a book on Bible Doctrine or Theology, but I test all of the various theologies with the Scriptures alone, and I have never agreed completely with any man’s *systematic* theology.

I praise God that I am not under any divine obligation to follow either Calvinism or Arminianism.

## **SOME CENTRAL ERRORS OF CALVINISM**

### **1. CALVINISM TURNS THEOLOGY INTO PHILOSOPHY**

Calvinism goes beyond biblical statements in an attempt to systematize the mysteries of God. John Calvin was a philosopher by training; his *Institutes* are extremely philosophical. It was first written when Calvin was young and only new converted to Protestantism, when his mind was still filled with the philosophy that he had studied as a Catholic priest.

True theology is simply believing and rightly interpreting the Bible, but God warns against philosophy and about leaving the simplicity of Christ (Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 11:3).

Philosophy is to use the human intellect and logic in an attempt to come to the truth apart from divine revelation. In the case of Calvinism, the problem is that he goes beyond the actual statements of Scripture and creates doctrine by human reasoning.

For example, Arthur Pink states, “If then God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass then He must have decreed that vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. Admitting the general premise, is not the specific conclusion inevitable?” (p. 84).

The answer is that Pink’s premise is wrong and so, therefore, is the conclusion. To say that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, is to go beyond what the Bible teaches. The Bible says He “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11), but that is not the same as actually foreordaining everything. And to build on this faulty platform by claiming that God must have decreed that vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved, is to allow human logic to assume the place of divine revelation.

Again, Pink says, “Now if God had willed their salvation, would He not have vouchsafed them the means of salvation? Would He not have given them all things necessary to that end? But it is an undeniable matter of fact that He did not” (p. 83).

This is all human reasoning. But what saith the Word of God? It says that God did will the salvation of all (1 Tim. 3:5-6; 2 Pet. 3:9) and did provide for it (1 Jn. 2:2), but He also gave man a choice to believe or disbelieve (Jn. 3:16).

Here is another example of the philosophical approach of Calvinism. Pink says, “Now all will acknowledge that from the foundation of the world God certainly fore-knew and fore-saw who would and who would not receive Christ as their Saviour, therefore in giving being and birth to those He knew would reject Christ, He necessarily created them unto damnation” (p. 82).

The authority for this statement is not the plain teaching of Scripture but the author’s human reasoning. Pink confuses foreknowledge with forewilling. A parent gives his children many choices and greater liberty as they grow older and he knows that they will make mistakes and he knows the consequences of those mistakes beforehand, but when the children do wrong that is not to say that the parent forewilled it.

In this context it is important to observe that Calvinism is not simple; it is very complicated. James White often makes the claim that Dave Hunt, who has debated him in print on this subject, doesn't understand Calvinism, even though he is intelligent and has studied the issue diligently. This highlights the complexity and philosophical nature of Calvinism. It results in an elitist mentality. Consider some of the terms that James White uses in his debate with Dave Hunt: compatibalism, monergism versus synergism, electing grace vs. irresistible grace, effectual calling vs. general calling, effective atonement vs. hypothetical atonement, libertarian free will vs. the bondage of the will. Other Calvinists speak of objective grace and subjective grace, natural ability and moral ability, mediate vs. immediate imputation of Adam's sin, supralapsarianism, sublapsarianism, infralapsarianism, desiderative vs. decretive will, and antecedent hypothetical will.

I believe that Calvinism is more akin to philosophy than to sound Bible theology and that it has left the simplicity that is in Christ.

## **2. THE CALVINIST SYSTEM TRIES TO RECONCILE THINGS THAT CANNOT BE RECONCILED IN THIS WORLD**

*Consider Acts 13:48 and Acts 13:46*

Verse 48 is a pet Calvinist verse: "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

The Calvinist says, "See, here is a plain statement that those who believe are those who are sovereignly ordained to believe." The problem is that the word "sovereignly" is added to what this verse actually states and Calvinist doctrine is read into the verse to make it say, "...as many as were sovereignly and arbitrarily elected believed." Any possibility that God's foreknowledge could allow for the exercise of human will is entirely discounted, but there is nothing in the verse itself to require such an interpretation.

Also, in verse 46 we see a different story. "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Here we see that salvation is associated with man's response to the gospel. According to the plain teaching of this verse, these Jews did not go to Hell because they were not part of the elect or because they were sovereignly elected to reprobation, but simply because they refused to believe. They reprobated themselves. Paul told them that God wanted to give them everlasting life and they rejected it.

*Consider John 6:37 and John 6:40*

Again, John 6:37 is a favorite Calvinist proof text. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The Calvinist finds his doctrines of Sovereign Election and Irresistible Grace here. The problem is that if "irresistible grace" is taught in this passage, it is for all who believe on Christ and not merely for a special few who were sovereignly pre-elected to be saved.

This verse does not say that God has sovereignly pre-chosen only some for salvation and that it is those pre-chosen ones that are given to Christ. One must read all of that into the verse. It simply says that all that the Father gives will come to Christ. The question is this: "Who is it that the Father gives to Jesus?"

That question is answered plainly in this passage only three verses later: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:40). (Of course the Calvinist argues that it is only the elect who can "see the Son," but one must read that into the verse.)

In verse 40 we see that the sovereign will of God is that each and every sinner that believes on Christ will be saved. Here the sovereign will of God is to allow men a choice in salvation, and a great many other verses agree.

*Consider John 6:44 and John 12:32*

John 6:44 is another Calvinist proof text. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

The Calvinist finds sovereign election and irresistible grace here.

Yet John 12:32 says, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

Here we see that Jesus draws all men.

How can these seemingly contradictory things be reconciled? Calvinism doesn't have the answer, because its proposed solution ignores or twists too many clear Scriptures.

I don't believe these things can be properly reconciled in this present world. We should simply let them stand and not try to force them into a perfectly formed theological system. God truly elects and man truly chooses. God elects and yet every man is urged to be saved and every man *can* be saved. God elects and yet sent His Son to die for the whole world. God elects and yet does not want any sinner to perish.

All are equally true and Scriptural, so let them ALL stand and do not try to reconcile that which the Bible itself does not reconcile and which therefore cannot be reconciled into a neat theological package in this present world.

### **3. CALVINISM'S DOCTRINES ARE CONTRARY TO THE PLAIN TEACHING OF GOD'S WORD**

#### THE BIBLE VS. THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE THAT FAITH IS A WORK

Calvinism says that grace means man cannot do anything, cannot even believe, because otherwise grace would not be grace and the sinner would have something to boast of.

First of all, this is unscriptural, because the Bible plainly says faith and believing are not works.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is not faith that is the gift of God; it is salvation that is the gift. Salvation is by grace but **THROUGH** faith. Faith is “the hand that reaches out and accepts the gift of God.” Faith is not a work.

“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:2-5).

Here we see plainly that faith is the opposite of works. Therefore to require that a sinner believe the gospel is not to require the sinner to do some sort of works for salvation.

Furthermore, this doctrine that faith is a work is unreasonable. Salvation is likened in Scripture to receiving a gift. It can also be likened to accepting a pardon and taking a life preserver. If someone purchases an expensive gift for me and I accept it, do I have anything to boast of? If I am in prison on death row for my crimes and the governor mercifully offers me a pardon and I accept it, have I done anything that I could boast of? If I am drowning in the ocean and a boat pulls alongside and offers to rescue me and I allow them to do that, have I thereby had some part in my salvation from drowning? Have I done something I could boast of? Of course not! When the sinner hears that Christ loves him and died for him and rose from the dead and offers him eternal salvation and the sinner joyfully receives that great salvation, that is not works and the sinner has nothing to boast about.

#### THE BIBLE VS. THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE THAT THE NEW BIRTH PRECEDES FAITH

Arthur Pink states this doctrine as follows: “Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. ... Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead--‘dead in trespasses and sins’--then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything. ‘So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God’ (Rom. 8:8)--but they could if it were possible for the flesh to

believe. ... That the work of the Holy Spirit precedes our believing is unequivocally established by 2 Thess. 2:13--‘God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.’ Note that ‘sanctification of the Spirit’ comes before and makes possible ‘belief of the truth’” (p. 73).

The chief passage on the New Birth is John 3. In verses 1-8 Jesus teaches Nicodemus that he must be born again or he cannot see the kingdom of God. In verse 9, Nicodemus asks Jesus how this can be. In verses 10-21, Jesus answers this question and explains how a man is born again, and the answer is that he is born again by believing (Jn. 3:14-16)! This is exactly what the Calvinist says the sinner cannot do. How can a dead man believe, he reasons? Well, if we are going to take the “dead man” analogy literally, a dead man can’t sin either. When the Bible says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins it means that he is separated from God’s divine life because of sin. To take this analogy beyond the actual teaching of the Bible and to give it other meanings, such as to reason that since the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins he must not be able to believe, is to move from truth to heresy.

Ephesians 1:13 also gives the order of salvation. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” First the sinner believes and then he receives the Holy Spirit.

The order of salvation is made clear in Acts 16:30-31 in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Note that the jailer was not born again when he asked what he must do to be saved, and Paul replied that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously Paul knew that the man could do exactly that and, that by believing he would be born again.

The order of salvation is also made clear in Ephesians 2:8-9--“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Faith is the means whereby we are saved; it is the hand that reaches out to accept God’s Gift.

What, then, does 2 Thessalonians 2:13 mean, when it says we are chosen to salvation “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”? In light of the previous passages, it is obvious that this verse is not stating the exact order of things. We have already learned that belief of the truth precedes the new birth. At the same time, from God’s perspective the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth occur simultaneously. Though we are saved through faith, that faith is exercised in the context of the Spirit of God enlightening and drawing and convicting and finally regenerating and sanctifying. It would therefore be humanly impossible to separate the “belief of the truth” from the “sanctification of the Spirit.”

#### THE BIBLE VS. THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN

The Bible teaches that man is morally corrupt (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18) and dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14), but it nowhere teaches that man cannot respond to the gospel. When I have challenged Calvinists to provide me with even one verse that says man is dead in trespasses and sins in SUCH A MANNER that he cannot even believe the gospel, they have never provided such a verse. One suggested Ephesians 2, but nowhere does Ephesians 2 teach such a thing. One has to read the Calvinist doctrine of “total depravity” into the Scripture.

The Bible teaches, rather, that God enables men to respond, giving them light (Jn. 1:9), drawing them (Jn. 12:32), convicting them (Jn. 16:8), calling them through the gospel (Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:14), and commanding them to repent (Acts 17:30) and believe on Christ (Acts 16:31).

#### THE BIBLE VS. THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

*CONSIDER CAIN.* Genesis 4:6-7--“And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

God spoke to Cain and urged him not to act on the jealous anger that was burning in his heart, and yet Cain resisted God’s will and murdered his brother. God gave Cain a clear choice. There is not a



hint in this passage that would make us conclude that God had predetermined that Cain be reprobate.

*CONSIDER THE WORLD BEFORE THE FLOOD.* Genesis 6:3--“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”

God strove with men before the flood and had Noah preach to them for 120 years while the ark was being built, but they resisted God and rejected his warning.

*CONSIDER ISRAEL OF OLD.* Romans 10:21--“But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

We see that God wanted to save Israel and continually reached out to them, but God’s salvation was resisted and rejected.

*CONSIDER ISRAEL OF CHRIST’S DAY.* Matthew 23:37--“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” John 5:40 “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

Here we see that the sovereign will of the Son of God, who desired to save Israel throughout her history and who often sent His prophets to her, was refused.

*CONSIDER THE UNSAVED OF OUR DAY.* 2 Corinthians 4:3-4--“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Here we see that men are blinded because of their own unbelief and they are lost because they reject the gospel. It is God’s sovereign will to save every sinner (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but sinners can resist Him.

*CONSIDER THE UNSAVED DURING THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST.* 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12--“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Why will these sinners perish? The reason is stated plainly, and it is not because they are not among the elect and is not because they were sovereignly reprobated. It is because they resist the gospel and reject the truth.

#### THE BIBLE VS. THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

God loves all men (Jn. 3:16).

God has commanded that the gospel be preached to every person (Mark 16:15).

God wants to have mercy upon all men (Rom. 11:32).

God desires to reconcile all men to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

The promise of faith by Jesus is for all (Gal. 3:22).

Jesus was a ransom for all men (1 Tim. 2:6).

Jesus tasted death for all men (Heb. 2:9).

Jesus bought even unsaved false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1).

God desires all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

Jesus provided propitiation for all men (1 Jn. 2:2).

The iniquity of all men was laid on Jesus (Isaiah 53:6).

The Calvinist’s doctrine of limited atonement is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture.

#### **4. CALVINISM INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE BY THEOLOGY RATHER THAN BY CONTEXT**

Its doctrines are not supported by the plain language of Scripture but are read into the Scripture. In Bible interpretation, the principle rule is to interpret according to the plain language of the text and according to the context.

Calvinism assigns preset definitions to theological terms instead of allowing the context to define them.

God's omnipotence means God's will cannot be resisted by man.

Election means man has no choice.

Total depravity means man is unable to respond to God and cannot even believe.

Let's consider the doctrine of Total Depravity more carefully. According to this doctrine, man is so dead in trespasses and sins in such a sense that he cannot even believe on Christ for salvation, that he cannot make any choice in regard to salvation. I have challenged Calvinists to give me even one Scripture that teaches this, and I have examined books by Calvinists for such a proof text, but in vain. The Scriptures they quote do not teach their doctrine. They cite, for example, Ephesians 1:1-4, but that passage says nothing about the sinner not being able to believe. It says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sin, walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, is a child of disobedience, and is by nature the child of wrath. But that is not the same as the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity which goes beyond the actual words of Scripture and adds the business about the sinner not being able to believe. They also cite Genesis 6:5 and Jeremiah 17:9 and Isaiah 64:6-7 and Romans 3:10-18, but again there is nothing in these verses about the Calvinist doctrine that the sinner is unable to believe, that he cannot exercise his will in receiving or rejecting salvation. After citing the previously mentioned Scriptures, Jeffrey Khoo of the Far Eastern Bible College concludes: "Man's freedom of choice has been forfeited since the Fall. ... The Bible teaches human inability and total depravity" (*Arminianism Examined*, p. 4). Yes, the Bible definitely teaches that man is totally depraved in the sense that the sinner is corrupt and there is nothing good in him that would warrant or that could earn salvation, but Calvinism goes beyond this and adds its own unique twist that is not supported by Scripture.

Consider the doctrine of Limited Atonement, that Christ died only to save the elect and that He did not die for the non-elect. "He died in order to procure and secure the salvation of the elect only. ... the atonement is limited or particular in its design and intention." Khoo quotes Augustine, who said that Christ's death was "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect." In other words, though Christ somehow made it possible for all sinners to be saved in this age, only the elect can actually be saved, because only they are effectively drawn and regenerated. There is not one Scripture to support this doctrine. Khoo quotes Matt. 1:21, which says Jesus will "save His people from their sins," but this does not say that Jesus died for the elect only. "His people" here refers to the Jews, and we know that Jesus did not die only for the Jews. The Calvinist quotes Eph. 5:25, that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, but this does not say that Christ died only for the elect. That Christ gave Himself for the church is not to say that Christ gave Himself ONLY for the church or any other such Calvinistic twist. The Calvinist quotes John 6:38-39, where Christ said, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Again, this does not support the Calvinist doctrine of Limited Atonement. In fact, it says nothing whatsoever about the extent of the atonement.

The Calvinist must support his doctrine, every point of it, from the Scripture alone interpreted properly by the plain meaning of the words and by context. This he cannot do. If he is not allowed to read his doctrine into the Scripture, he is not able to support his doctrine from Scripture.

## **5. CALVINISM MISSTATES WHAT NON-CALVINISTS BELIEVE**

There are many strawman arguments that the Calvinist erects and defeats, but by defeating them he has only defeated a figment of his own imagination.

Calvinists claim, for example, that the non-Calvinist doesn't believe in God's sovereignty. I can't speak for others, but this non-Calvinist certainly believes in God's sovereignty. God is God and He can do whatsoever He pleases whensoever He pleases. As one man said, "Whatever the Bible says, I believe; the Bible says the whale swallowed Jonah, and I believe it; and if the Bible said that Jo-

nah swallowed the whale, I would believe that.” If the Bible taught that God sovereignly selects some sinners to go to Heaven and sovereignly elects the rest to go to Hell or that He chooses only some to be saved and allows the rest to be destroyed, I would believe it, because I believe God is God and man cannot tell God what is right or wrong. But the Bible reveals, rather, that the sovereign God made man with a will and that the sinner can still exercise that will in receiving or rejecting Christ. This does not detract from God’s sovereignty one *iota*.

They claim, further, that the non-Calvinist believes man is saved by his own will. I can’t speak for others, but this non-Calvinist does not believe that. No sinner can believe unless God enables him to do so. The Bible plainly states that Jesus enlightens (Jn. 1:9) and draws (Jn. 12:37) every man. Man is not saved by his will; he is saved by the grace of God in Christ and because of the blood of Christ. Jn. 1:12-13 leaves no doubt about this. “*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” Verse 12 says as many as receive Jesus and believe on His name are born again, but verse 13 says this salvation by faith is not “the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Thus, believing on Christ is not some sort of “will salvation.”

They claim that the non-Calvinist doesn’t believe that salvation is 100% of God, that by saying that the sinner can believe on Christ is to say that “he contributes to his salvation” and “thus, the work of salvation is not totally God’s” (Jeffrey Khoo, *Arminianism Examined*, Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, p. 2). Arthur Pink says that if the sinner could yield to or resist Christ, “then the Christian would have ground for boasting and self-glorying over his co-operation with the Spirit...” (p. 128). Again, while I can’t speak for others, this non-Calvinist most definitely believes that salvation is 100% of God. It is God who enlightens (Jn. 1:9), convicts (Jn. 16:7-8), draws (Jn. 12:32), and saves. Man does nothing but receive a Gift and that is not a work and is not something to boast of! As with salvation, so with Christian living, it is all of God and man has nothing to boast of. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13); and, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Salvation is all of Christ, from beginning to end. This idea that receiving a gift leaves the recipient in a position to boast is ridiculous. The recipient of a Priceless Gift does not boast of himself but of the Giver. The man who is rescued from the sea and escapes certain death does not brag about what he did for himself but about what the rescuer did, even though the drowning man perhaps took hold of a life preserver that was thrown to him or relaxed in the arms of the lifeguard.

They say that the teaching that man can believe on or reject Christ means that one believes that the sinner is not truly depraved and that man is a “free moral agent.” Arthur Pink says this in his chapter on “God’s Sovereignty and the Human Will.” He presents many strawmen in this section. He says, “Does it lie within the province of man’s will to accept or reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour? ... The answer to this question defines our conception of human depravity. ... Man is a rational being and as such responsible and accountable to God, but to affirm that he is a free moral agent is to deny that he is totally depraved...” (p. 138). I certainly don’t believe that the sinner is a “free moral agent,” and I believe that man is totally without righteousness before God, dead in trespasses and sins, etc. I simply agree with what the Bible says about man believing the gospel. The Bible says that “whosoever believeth in him shall not perish” (Jn. 3:16). That teaches me that a sinner can believe on Christ, but to go beyond this simple concept and to claim that such a position is to deny human depravity or is to make him into a “free moral agent” is nonsense. Romans 3:10-18 and Eph. 2:1-4 are key New Testament passages on the depravity of the sinner, but neither passage mentions man’s will or whether he can or cannot believe on Christ for salvation. The same is true for every passage in the Bible that deals with man’s depravity in Adam, such as Gen. 6:4; Psa. 51:5; 58:3; Prov. 22:15; Ecc. 9:3; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; and Mat. 15:9. Again, the Calvinist reads his own theology into these passages.

Pink and other Calvinists even liken the non-Calvinist’s position on so-called “free will” to that of the Roman Catholic Church. Pink quotes from the Council of Trent, which said, “If any one shall affirm, that man’s free-will, moved and excited by God, does not, by consenting, co-operate with God, the mover and exciter, so as to prepare and dispose itself for the attainment of justification; if

moreover anyone shall say, that the human will cannot refuse complying, if it pleases; but that it is unactive, and merely passive; let such an one be accursed.” Pink then concludes: “Thus, those who today insist on the free-will of the natural man believe precisely what Rome teaches on the subject! ... the Roman Catholics and Arminians walk hand in hand...” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 139). This is libelous in the extreme. The Roman Catholic Church believes that man is not utterly unrighteous in his fallen state and that he can actually cooperate with God in his justification, that salvation is by faith plus works and sacraments rather than by faith alone. The non-Calvinist does not believe anything like this. He simply believes the Scripture when it says that “whosoever believeth in him shall not perish” (Jn. 3:16) and he doesn’t try to bend such Scriptures to conform to the TULIP mold.

These are only a few examples of how the Calvinist tends to misstate and misrepresent what the non-Calvinist believes.

## **6. CALVINISM CONFUSES THE CHURCH WITH ISRAEL AND NATIONAL ELECTION WITH PERSONAL (Rom. 9:9-24)**

John Calvin’s major argument for unconditional election and reprobation is based on God’s dealings with Israel. This is described in Calvin’s *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 21, “Eternal Election.”

### Romans 9:9-24

9:9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.

10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

This is doubtless the Calvinist’s favorite proof text for sovereign election. Does Romans 9 teach that God arbitrarily or sovereignly chooses some sinners to be saved and the rest to be lost? Let’s consider eight important facts about this passage:

(1) The example of Esau and Jacob does not refer to election pertaining to personal salvation but to election pertaining to nations in God’s overall program. Verse 12 makes this clear. “It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.” The promise of God to Rebecca was about the elder son serving the younger, not about their personal salvation. Esau could have gotten saved. He could have believed in God and been in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. This passage does not teach that Esau was sovereignly predestined to be reprobate. It teaches that God sovereignly chose Christ’s lineage.

(2) As for Pharaoh, the Bible says that he rejected God’s Word in Exodus 5:2 before God hardened his heart in Exodus 7:3. “Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:2). Also the Bible twice says that Pha-

raoh hardened his own heart. “But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” (Ex. 8:15). See also Exodus 9:34. This is not a case of sovereign reprobation. The Scripture teaches that it is always Gods will for men to serve Him, but when they reject Him He rejects them and judges them and makes examples of them. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12--“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: THAT THEY ALL MIGHT BE DAMNED WHO BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” These sinners will be damned but not because they are not sovereignly elected and not because they are sovereignly reprobate but because of their personal decision in regard to the truth. Words could not be plainer. God did make an example of Pharaoh and God did harden his heart for this purpose, but to go beyond what the Bible says and to claim that God chose to create Pharaoh for the purpose of reprobating him is a great error and is to malign the name of the loving God.

(3) Rom. 9:22-23 does not say that God sovereignly fits some sinners to destruction and some to glory. The phrase “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” allows for a variant voice; according to the *PC Study Bible*, it can be both the passive and middle voice in Greek; middle means to fit oneself. In the middle voice the subject acts in relation to him/herself. Consider this note from Vincent Word Studies: “NOT FITTED BY GOD FOR DESTRUCTION, but in an adjectival sense, ready, ripe for destruction, the participle denoting a present state previously formed, BUT GIVING NO HINT OF HOW IT HAD BEEN FORMED. That the objects of final wrath had themselves a hand in the matter may be seen from 1 Thess. 2:15-16.” By allowing the Bible to speak for itself through the plain meaning of the words and by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that the sinner fits himself for destruction by his rejection of the truth. Even those who have never heard the gospel, have the light of creation and conscience and are responsible to respond to the light that they have that they might be given more light (Acts 17:26-27).

(4) Rom. 9:23-24 does not mean that God calls only a certain pre-chosen elect group to salvation. “And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” One has to read that into the language of the verses. The Calvinist claims that verse 24 refers to “effectual calling,” which is a term that describes the “irresistible calling of the elect,” but this is adding to God’s Word, which is a great error. The Bible plainly states that God has called all who will come to Christ. God calls through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) and the gospel is to be preached to every creature (Mk. 16:15). God calls “whosoever will” (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17). God calls every one that believes on Christ. “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40).

(5) God’s salvation even of the Jews was not a matter of “sovereign” election but was based on an individual’s faith in His Word. “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom. 9:31-33).

(6) Romans 10 leaves no doubt about this; the promise of salvation proves that it is not God’s arbitrary or “sovereign” choice (Rom. 10:8-13). Note the words “whosoever” and “all.” Would God mock sinners by promising them salvation if they believe in Christ and then only enable those who were sovereignly elected to actually exercise such faith?

(7) God’s sovereignty does not mean that His will is always accomplished in man. “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). See also Matt. 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” God has made man in His image. Man is not a robot. He can exercise his will in saying no to God, and man has said no to God

and has resisted God from Genesis to Revelation. If God's sovereignty means that His will is always done, this world would make no sense! It is God's will, for example, for every believer to "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16), but we know all too well that this is not always the case and is never the case perfectly.

(8) God's blinding of Israel was not a matter of sovereign election but it was because they first hardened their own hearts. Consider Ezek. 12:2; Mat. 13:15 and Acts 28:25-27:

Ezekiel 12:2--"Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house."

Ezekiel says the cause for Israel's blindness is her own rebellion.

Matthew 13:15--"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and **THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED**; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

Matthew says Israel closed her own eyes and that is the reason they were not converted. There is no sovereign reprobation here.

Acts 28:25-27--"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and **THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED**; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

Again, Acts says Israel closed her own eyes lest she be converted. There is no support for the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign reprobation here.

## **7. CALVINISM GOES BACK TO THE "CHURCH FATHERS" FOR AUTHORITY INSTEAD OF STRICTLY TO THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTLES AND PROPHETS**

Calvin freely acknowledged that his authority was Augustine. Consider the following quotes:

"If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his" (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22).

"Let Augustine answer for me..." (Ibid.).

"[Augustine is the one] we quote most frequently as being the best and most faithful witness of all antiquity" (*Institutes*, Book IV, chap. 14).

"Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so ... out of his writings" (Calvin, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," trans. by Henry Cole, *Calvin's Calvinism*, Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1987, p. 38; cited in Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, 1999, p. 38).

WHO WAS AUGUSTINE? He was so polluted with heresy that the Roman Catholic Church has claimed him as one of its "doctors."

Augustine was a persecutor and the father of the doctrine of persecution in the Catholic Church. The historian Neander observed that Augustine's teaching "contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition." He instigated bitter persecutions against the Bible-believing Donatists who were striving to maintain pure churches after the apostolic faith.

Augustine was the father of amillennialism, interpreting Bible prophecy allegorically; teaching that the Catholic Church is the kingdom of God.

Augustine taught that Mary did not commit sin.

Augustine believed in purgatory.

Augustine was one of the fathers of the heresy of infant baptism, claiming that unbaptized infants were lost, and calling all who rejected infant baptism “infidels” and “cursed.”

Augustine exalted church tradition above the Bible and said, “I should not believe the gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church.”

## **8. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN CHRIST’S WARNINGS AND HIS JUDGMENTS**

Repeatedly, Christ warned sinners that except they repent and believe on Him they would perish (e.g., Lk. 13:3, 5; Jn. 8:24). Christ also issued judgments upon sinners because they did not believe.

Luke 10:12-16--“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to Hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”

In light of Calvinism’s definition of sovereign election and the irresistible drawing and regeneration of the elect, Christ’s warnings and judgments make no sense. Why would He warn sinners to repent and believe or perish and pronounce severe judgment upon sinners for not believing if He knows that only those who are sovereignly elected can do such a thing?

Calvinists have made pathetic attempts to answer this, but in my estimation the fact of Christ’s warnings simply and plainly refutes their doctrine.

## **9. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN THE APOSTLE PAUL**

Paul attempted to win the more. “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Cor. 9:19). How can I win more if the number of the elect has been settled from eternity?

Paul’s goal was to “save some.” “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some: (1 Cor. 9:22). Isn’t the election of the saved already assured without Paul’s help? How could anything he did in his life and ministry have any affect upon the elect?

Paul sacrificed so that men would be saved. “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:33). If election is sovereignly predetermined and irresistible, Paul’s statement makes no sense.

Paul persuaded men. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:11). If Paul were a Calvinist, he would know that the elect don’t need persuading and the non-elect can’t be persuaded!

Paul was willing to go to Hell for the unsaved Jews. “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). How could a mere man care more about the destiny of the unsaved than God? We are convinced that the cry of Paul’s heart here is merely a mirror of the cry of God’s own heart for all lost sinners.

## **10. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

The book of Hebrews refutes the Calvinist or TULIP doctrines of unconditional and “sovereign” election and irresistible grace, that God sovereignly and arbitrarily chooses who will be saved and irresistibly and absolutely draws them so that on one hand it is impossible for the non-elect to be saved and on the other hand it is impossible for the elect not to be saved. If this were true, the Holy Spirit would not give such dire warnings and exhortations to professing believers about the possibility of apostasy, because if they are elected they could not possibly perish and if they are not elected, nothing they could do would change their status. Consider, for example, the following passages:

Consider Hebrews 2:3: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

This exhortation makes no sense in light of Calvinist doctrines. If election is as the Calvinist teaches, how could the elect neglect salvation and how could the non-elect do anything other than neglect salvation?

Consider Hebrews 3:12-14: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.”

If the elect are predetermined “sovereignly” and if election has nothing whatsoever to do with the sinner himself and if he is irresistibly drawn, what could this exhortation possibly mean? How could a sovereignly elected, irresistibly drawn believer depart from God, and how could the non-elect do anything other than depart from God?

Consider Hebrews 4:9-11: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

How could this exhortation possibly apply to TULIP type election? This passage says the rest of salvation is something that every person must seek to enter into and all are urged to do so, but the doctrine of “sovereign” election teaches us that those elected to God’s rest are predetermined solely by God and they have no choice in the matter and will assuredly enter into that rest.

Consider Hebrews 6:4-6: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

If TULIP theology is true, why the exhortation? How could the elect fall away? And how could the non-elect do anything but fall away?

Consider Hebrews 10:26-29: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

Again, if TULIP theology is true, why would such an exhortation be given to professing believers? If they are sovereignly elected, they will surely persevere and if they aren’t they surely won’t. According to Calvinist doctrine, it has nothing to do with them or what they do.

If election is “sovereign” and “unconditional” in a Calvinist sense and the believer has no choice whatsoever in the matter of salvation, these passages don’t make any sense.

If, on the other hand, election involves an element of foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2) and involves a personal choice on the part of the sinner (“whosoever believeth,” Jn. 3:15, 16; 12:46; Acts 10:43; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 22:17; etc.), the exhortations and warnings in Hebrews make perfect sense. Because if this is true, and we know that it is because the Bible everywhere teaches it, then the sinner, being given light from Christ (Jn. 1:9) and being drawn by Christ (Jn. 12:32) and being convicted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:8) can, because of this gracious divine enablement, either believe on Christ or not and it is also possible for a sinner to come close to salvation without actually possessing it. Therefore he needs to be exhorted to believe on Jesus Christ truly and sincerely and not to turn away before he has been genuinely born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and adopted into God’s family.

## **11. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN PRAYER**



Arthur Pink says, “God’s will is immutable, and cannot be altered by our cryings” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 173).

In fact, God’s will can be altered by our prayers.

Prayer can never demand that God do something. Prayer is not demanding but asking. Prayer must always be in accordance with “the will of God” (Rom. 1:10). ‘If we ask anything according to his will he heareth us’ (1 Jn. 5:14). But that is not to say that prayer is merely a robotic response to that which God has eternally predetermined. God has given man the responsibility to pray and has pledged Himself to answer, as long as the prayer is in accordance with His will. That means that it is up to man whether to pray or not to pray, how much to pray, and how earnestly. And those prayers change things in things world!

Prayer can even change God’s mind. Consider the following amazing scene that occurred on Mt. Sinai:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: NOW THEREFORE LET ME ALONE, THAT MY WRATH MAY WAX HOT AGAINST THEM, AND THAT I MAY CONSUME THEM: AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. AND THE LORD REPENTED OF THE EVIL WHICH HE THOUGHT TO DO UNTO HIS PEOPLE” (Ex. 32:9-14).

God told Moses that He would consume Israel and make a great nation of Moses, but Moses pleaded with Him and the Bible says that God repented. Where does this fit into Calvinism’s emphasis upon God’s *absolute* sovereignty? Here we see God interacting with man and His mind literally being changed by man’s pleas.

Someone will ask at this point about Numbers 23:19, which says, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

There is no contradiction between Num. 23:19 and Ex. 32:14. In Numbers 23 Balaam is speaking about God’s eternal plan for Israel, and in that He will not repent. “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:29). But within the context of God’s overall plan for the ages, He does repent or change His mind in relation to man’s actions in many ways, and that is the mystery of prayer.

What about 1 Sam. 15:29, which says, “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent”? This statement was made by Samuel after God had rejected Saul and chosen David as the new king. Saul was pleading with Samuel to change his mind about that decision, and Samuel replied that God’s decisions in such matters are unchangeable.

There are times in which God’s mind can be changed and there are times when it cannot. At one point, God told two of the prophets not to pray for Israel (Jer. 7:16; Ezek. 14:4), but that was after Israel had gone too far in rebellion and God had determined to judge them. After other times, prayer, such as that of Moses in Exodus 32, drove back God’s wrath and gave Israel more time.

Neither Num. 23:19 nor 1 Sam. 15:29 change the fact that God repented of His plan to destroy Israel in Exodus 32 in response to Moses’ earnest intercession.

The fact is that man is an amazing creation. He is made in God’s image, and he is not a robot or a puppet. God is still God, but God has ordained that man has a will and can say yes or no to Him. Men can even change God’s mind through earnest entreaties! That is the wondrous power of prayer.

Consider another prayer scene in Scripture. In Isaiah 38 we read that King Hezekiah was sick unto death and God told the prophet Isaiah to go to him and say, “Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (Isa. 38:1). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept and “prayed unto the Lord.” The Bible says that after this, God sent Isaiah back to the king to say, “Thus said the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (Isa. 38:5).

In response to earnest prayer God gave him 15 more years of life on earth. Prayer changes things!

“What takes the greater power (omnipotence): to create beings who have no ability to choose--who are mere pawns on God’s cosmic chessboard--or to create beings who have the freedom to accept or reject God’s salvation? I submit, the latter. ... Would a God who ordained the existence of immortal beings without making any provision for them to escape eternal torment be a cruel being? What kind of God would call on mankind to ‘believe and be saved’ when He knows they cannot [and] what kind of relationship is there between God and people who could never choose Him--but are ‘irresistibly’ called...? For these and other reasons I question the idea that individual unconditional election and five-point Calvinism best reflect the attributes of God. A God who sovereignly offers salvation to all through His elect Saviour reflects both power and love.” (Philip F. Cogdon, “Soteriological Implications of Five-Point Calvinism,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1995; cited from Dave Hunt, *A Calvinist’s Honest Doubts Resolved*, p. 76).

### **I DO NOT TREAT ALL CALVINISTS THE SAME**

It is important to understand that there is a great variety of doctrine and practice among Calvinists, and by no means do I consider a man to be an enemy of the truth just because he accepts some of the Calvinist theology. The book *Spurgeon vs. Hyper Calvinists: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* by Iain Murray (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1995) does an excellent job of describing some of the differences among Calvinists. There are soul winning Calvinists, Calvinists with great evangelistic and missionary zeal; and there are Calvinists who condemn these things. Some interpret Calvinism in such a way that they do not believe in offering salvation to or preaching the gospel to all sinners; they do not even believe that God loves all men. According to Murray’s definition, these are “hyper Calvinists.”

Charles Spurgeon refused to try to reconcile every seeming contradiction in the Bible, and he was wise enough to know that he could not understand every mystery of God. He said:

“That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring” (C.H. Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 4, 1858, p. 337).

Spurgeon warned about creating theologies that attempt to reconcile every biblical difficulty:

“Men who are morbidly anxious to possess a self-consistent creed, a creed which will put together and form a square like a Chinese puzzle,--are very apt to narrow their souls. Those who will only believe what they can reconcile will necessarily disbelieve much of divine revelation. Those who receive by faith anything which they find in the Bible will receive two things, twenty things, ay, or twenty thousand things, though they cannot construct a theory which harmonises them all” (C.H. Spurgeon, “Faith,” *Sword and Trowel*, 1872).

In these matters, Charles Spurgeon was a Calvinist but he was much more than a Calvinist; he was a Biblicist. It has been said of Spurgeon, that if you pricked him, even his blood was “bibline.” He loved theology and studied theology earnestly, but the bottom line was that he had childlike faith in everything the Bible says.

And while Spurgeon was a Calvinist, he was at the same time a great evangelist and believed in offering the gospel to all men and urging all men to be saved. Spurgeon believed that more sinners could be saved if the gospel was preached to them, and he did not try to reconcile such a view with God's election. He believed his responsibility was to preach the gospel to as many sinners as possible. He believed that tools such as prayer could result in a greater harvest of souls. He had prayer meetings before the preaching services and every Monday night and on other occasions. Sometimes when the auditorium of the Metropolitan Tabernacle was full, a group would remain in the downstairs prayer hall and pray during the preaching (as per an e-mail from Mrs. Hannah Wyncoll, Administrative Assistant, Metropolitan Tabernacle, June 2, 2000). Spurgeon loved soul winning and taught his people to be soul winners. His famous book *The Soul Winner* is still in print. There were some in Spurgeon's church who "made it their special work to 'watch for souls' in our great congregation, and to seek to bring to immediate decision those who appeared to be impressed under the preaching of the Word. [Bro. Cloud: Note the word 'decision' in Spurgeon's description of this soul winner!] One brother has earned for himself the title of my hunting dog, for he is always ready to pick up the wounded birds. One Monday night, at the prayer-meeting, he was sitting near me on the platform; all at once I missed him, and presently I saw him right at the other end of the building. After the meeting, I asked why he went off so suddenly, and he said that the gas just shone on the face of a woman in the congregation, and she looked so sad that he walked round, and sat near her, in readiness to speak to her about the Saviour after the service" (C.H. Spurgeon, *The Full Harvest*, p. 76). Thus we see that Charles Spurgeon was a man who was very zealous for the winning of souls, and his Calvinism and his convictions about the sovereignty of God in no wise hindered that.

On the other hand, many Calvinists of that day opposed Spurgeon vehemently from their pulpits and in their magazines and denounced his practice of giving invitations for sinners to come to Christ. (He did not have the people actually come forward during the church service as is commonly practiced today, but he invited them to come to Christ all the same; and he believed that a sinner was saved in every seat in the Metropolitan Tabernacle's massive auditorium of that day.)

For example, one popular Calvinist paper of Spurgeon's day was the *Earthen Vessel*. In one of its issues in 1857, it boldly stated that "to preach that it is man's duty to believe savingly in Christ is ABSURD." Well, that was exactly what Spurgeon preached, so to a great many Calvinists of his day, Spurgeon was an absurd fellow!

This reminds us that there are different kinds of Calvinists and it is not wise to lump them all into the same mold.

I have had the privilege of knowing, and communicating at a distance with, many godly soul winning Calvinists. Though I am in strong disagreement with such men on the subject of Calvinist theology, I do not consider them enemies.

At the same time, I believe that our differences in theology are great enough to disallow us to minister together or to be members together of the same church.

### **BEWARE OF ANOTHER DANGER: QUICK PRAYERISM**

A danger that is at least as damaging to evangelism as Calvinism is the "Easy Believism" or "Quick Prayerism" that is so prevalent among fundamental Baptists and many other groups. I prefer to call it "Quick Prayerism" rather than "Easy Believism" because the fact is that salvation is by believing (John 3:16) and it is not difficult. Those who practice Quick Prayerism are characterized as follows:

(1) *They are quick to "lead people to Christ" even when the gospel presentation has been shallow and insufficient.* Consider the following statement on "What is Salvation?" from Saddleback Church pastored by Rick Warren of Purpose Driven Church fame: "Our disobedient nature has eternally separated us from our Creator. No matter how hard we try, we can never earn our way back into God's presence. Our only hope is to trust Jesus as God's provision for our disobedience." This statement is so shallow and insufficient that it is difficult to know where to begin, but briefly, salvation is much more than a vague, undefined decision "to trust Jesus as God's provision for our disobedience." There is no mention of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, even though this is how Paul defined the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. There is no mention of the blood. No mention of repentance. The Saddleback paraphrase of the gospel is no gospel at all, and to lead a person

in a sinner's prayer when this is all of the "gospel" they understand is a crime and a disgrace to the cause of Christ. The shallowness of this type of evangelism is why I could sit next to a church member at Saddleback last year and have him tell me that he has always been a Christian. This was in response to my question, "When were you born again?"

(2) *They are quick to lead people in a prayer even when there is no evidence of conviction or regeneration*, in contrast to the Apostle Paul who, like John the Baptist, required evidence of repentance. "But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20).

(3) *They are quick to ignore repentance or redefine repentance to have nothing to do with sin or a change of life*. The typical soul-winning plan doesn't even hint at repentance, that there is going to be a change of direction, a submission to God.

Many have rejected traditional definitions of repentance as "a change of mind that results in a change of life" and have re-defined repentance, instead, as merely "a change from unbelief to belief." If a large percentage of their "converts" show no sign of a change of life, it does not greatly concern them, because they do not believe that repentance always results in a change of life.

(4) *They are quick to give people assurance even if there is no evidence of salvation*. Biblical security is only for those who are genuinely born again and those who are such will give clear evidence of it (2 Cor. 5:17). To give assurance to someone, especially a complete stranger, merely because he has prayed a sinner's prayer or has walked down an aisle and professed Christ to a church worker is very dangerous, because it tends to give false hope to large numbers of unregenerate people.

(5) *They are quick to count numbers regardless of how empty*. Those who practice Quick Prayerism typically report large numbers of "salvations" even though a significant percentage of their professions give no evidence of salvation. In my experience, it is not uncommon that 90% of the professions produced under such ministries are fruitless. It is dishonest to give such reports. It is one thing to say that "20 men prayed to receive Christ in the prison last night" or "500 people prayed the sinner's prayer through the ministry of our church last year." It is quite another thing to say "20 men got saved in the prison last night" or "500 people got saved through the ministry of our church last year." This is especially true when the one giving the report knows by experience that most of his "converts" don't pan out and that most of the professions produced in his ministry are as empty as a homeless man's refrigerator.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I am not saying that there are forms of Calvinism that are Scriptural and that it is only some types of more extreme Calvinism that are unscriptural. Spurgeon said that we need to go back to the Calvinism of John Calvin. As much as I respect Charles Haddon Spurgeon (knowing, too, that he was only a man), I must disagree with that grand old warrior in this matter. I say we need to go far beyond that. Calvin himself went back as far as Augustine, but that, too, is not nearly far enough. In fact, depending on the very undependable Augustine was one of Calvin's chief errors. We don't need to go back to Calvin or Augustine. We need to go all the way back to "the faith once delivered to the saints" as it is perfectly and sufficiently recorded in the Scriptures! That is where our systematic theology must start *AND END*.

*For more on this subject see the following:*

**James White's Debate Challenge** - <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/james-whites-challenge.html>

**Dave Hunt's Refutation of Calvinism** - <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/davehunt-calvinrefutation.html>

**Debating Calvinism** - <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/debating-calvinism.html>

**The Calvinism Debate** - <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/calvinismdebate.html>

**'Calvin's Camels'** - <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/calvins-camels.html>