

### What In The World Is Calvinism? (III)

*“This righteousness from God comes through FAITH in Jesus Christ to ALL who BELIEVE.”* Romans 3:22a

Last week, I provided a very brief (and certainly incomplete!) history of who John Calvin was and why he became a central figure of the Protestant Reformation during the early to mid-1500’s. Before we dive into the subject of John Calvin’s doctrine, I believe it is important to emphasize that the “Reformed Theology” we have come to know as “Calvinism” was not suddenly originated by John Calvin when he began writing a summary of Protestant beliefs in 1535 AD. His *“Institutes of Christian Religion”*, that began being published and became popular in 1536, were actually organized explanations of the teachings of many great theologians of Christian history. Augustine (354-430 AD), Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 AD), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD), as well as host of contemporary Protestant professors and scholars that Calvin met and learned from while pursuing degrees in Religion and Law, all significantly influenced his theology and doctrine. In other words, John Calvin is not known as an “inventor” or “originator” of the doctrinal thoughts that support “Reformed Theology”; rather, his genius was recognized by his ability to summarize and present the vast writings and theological arguments of the previous Church Fathers in a systematic approach which made compelling arguments for the biblical validity of the Protestant Reformation. (Note: This means in all “fairness” we should not treat “Calvinism” as if John Calvin was the only person in history who believed the way he did!)

Based on this history and knowledge of some of John Calvin’s background that led to his theological beliefs, let me try to answer the question: “What did John Calvin actually believe?”. The doctrines of “Calvinism”, or “Reformed Theology” (which is its most proper name), have been summarized and abbreviated over the years by scholars so that it can be presented in a manner which is easier to understand than what a normal person could grasp from the thousand of pages written by John Calvin. Known as the FIVE (5) POINTS of Reformed Theology, Calvinism of our day is popularly presented through an acronym using the word TULIP. Through the study of Scripture to determine how God saves a man or woman, Calvinist have come to believe in:

Point 1) **T**otal “depravity” of a Human Soul – (Man is so sinful, he is absolutely incapable of “seeking God” or even “desiring” to be “saved”. Therefore, man must be “born again” FIRST; so that he can begin to believe with a God-given faith that “justifies” the believer in God’s eyes!)

*Note: Southern Baptists have “traditionally” taught that the Scriptures reveal that although man is definitely “depraved”, God draws all men to Himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, in a way that allows sinful man to understand the “gospel” enough that he can make a “choice” to believe or NOT believe. If he believes, THEN God acts on that person’s God-given faith to REGENERATE his soul. Calvinists do not believe “salvation” involves man’s choice!*

Point 2) **U**nconditional ELECTION – (By God’s grace and sovereign choice, apart from ANY merit of any person, He has chosen to “save” some, but not all, depraved sinners. This choice of the “elect” was made before even one human being was created. Therefore, the “elect” are “predestined” for salvation!)

*Note: Many Southern Baptist do not believe that the bible teaches that God is “predestining” most people to HELL without them ever having even one opportunity to be saved. Calvinists believe God never truly “desired” or “willed” ALL to be saved!*

Point 3) **L**imited ATONEMENT – (When Christ died on the cross, it was to make “atonement” only for the sins of the ELECT!)

*Note: Most Southern Baptists have “traditionally” believed that Jesus died for the sins of the WHOLE world! However, the application of this atonement to a person’s actual sins is forfeited if they reject God’s offer of salvation through Christ.*

Point 4) **I**rresistible GRACE – (Everyone the Holy Spirit “calls” to salvation by grace is “effective”. This means no one can resist God’s will for a person to be saved. Therefore, God could not possibly desire “all” to be saved...or everyone WOULD be saved. God makes sure all of the “elect” are ALL saved!)

*Note: Southern Baptists have “traditionally” believed that God draws ALL men to Himself (John 12:32), but many refuse to believe in salvation through Christ (John 6:62-64; John 8:45-46) so they reject God’s offer of salvation.*

Point 5) **P**reservation of the Saints – (The “elect” will neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace. God will ensure that their faith perseveres to the end so that they can be eternally saved.)

*Note: Southern Baptists have “traditionally” agreed with “once REALLY saved...ALWAYS saved” (John 10:27-30)!*

These are brief summaries (and brief arguments against) the five (5) basic tenants of “Calvinism”. In future articles, I will provide the Scriptural evidence that Calvinists use to support their “Reformed Theology”, as well as the Scriptural basis Southern Baptists have used in their arguments against Calvinism. Until then, remember that God does not want you rely on

Calvinist, Southern Baptist, or even “my” beliefs. Rather, He wants you to search the Scriptures for yourself! (2Tim 2:15)  
– **Pastor Louis**