

What In The World Is Calvinism? (I)

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who CORRECTLY handles the word of truth.” 2Timothy 2:15

Northbridge is one of over 49,000 churches in America who have partnered together in order to accomplish collective mission work to better advance the kingdom of God. This “association” of theologically like-minded churches is currently called the Southern Baptist Convention. What makes it unique from denominations such as Catholics, Episcopalians, or Methodists is the freedom (i.e. “autonomy”) each individual church has to make their own decisions as they feel led by the Holy Spirit. The historical roots of current day “Southern Baptists” stemmed from a firm commitment to some basic beliefs which included the affirmation of the “priesthood of believers”. Based on verses of Scripture such as 1Peter 2:5 and Revelation 1:6, Baptists believe that the Spirit of God is capable of leading each individual believer, as well as each individual church, to be and to do what is pleasing to Christ without the assistance of a human ruling body (i.e. “Nicolaitans”; see Rev 2:15). Southern Baptists trust that the Holy Spirit is quite capable of leading each individual Christian and each individual church to “know and understand the truth of the Word of God” (John 8:31-32; John 14:26; 1Cor 2:11-13) without coming up with man-made doctrinal creeds which people are “forced” to believe, whether or not they even understand them.

This is not to say that Baptists will “associate with” (i.e. partner with) just any group of people who call themselves “Christians”, “Baptists”, or a “Church”. The New Testament is filled with warnings about false teachers and people who claim to have a relationship with Christ, but deny Him by their teachings and their actions (2Peter 2; Jude; 1John; etc.). That is why Southern Baptists came together several times over the past 100 years to put together a list of specific doctrinal truths that are considered “essential” common beliefs that bind us together as brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we can work together to share the gospel with a lost and dying world. These documents have become known as “**The Baptist Faith and Message**” which currently consists of eighteen (18) agreed upon “doctrines” that Southern Baptists hold precious and as essential to the Baptist tradition of faith and practice. (Note: The latest update and vote on these commonly held “truths” was held in the year 2000. If you would like a copy of this document, call the church office and we can give you a copy.)

While it is true that no Baptist church or entity (such as a Seminary or State Convention) can “force” a pastor or a church to believe and teach each of the eighteen expressed doctrines contained within “The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000”, it is possible for local, state, and even national conventions of Baptist churches to vote to “disassociate” with churches that are known to teach and/or practice things that are believed to be non-Scriptural. As the prophet Amos writes: *“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* (Amos 3:3) For instance, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was God, the Son. If a pastor of a Southern Baptist Church began to teach that Jesus was NOT God, the Son, and the church body he was pastor of accepted this teaching and began to spread it throughout their local community, then it is quite possible that this church would be “voted out” of fellowship with other Southern Baptist Churches. We would never dare to force this pastor or church to teach the right doctrine, but we would “disassociate” from them so that everyone would know that the biblical revelations about Jesus Christ’s deity are not open to “interpretations”.

But what happens when Southern Baptists disagree about certain doctrines that are not one of the 18 agreed upon truths of Scriptures? You see, not all Southern Baptists believe the exact same thing about every point of Scripture. We agree on the essentials (i.e. the Trinity, the virgin birth of Christ, baptism of “believers” through immersion, etc., etc.); however, we are tolerant on the non-essentials (i.e. the rapture of the church, the exact events of prophecy, the proper organization of a Christian church, etc., etc.). This does not mean that God has not presented the world with one (1) truth on each of these matters. It is just we believe that no one is perfect in their understanding and interpretation of each and every doctrine presented in Scripture. As we grow in Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, sometimes we find that doctrines we have “traditionally” held as true...were not accurate interpretations of the Word of God (Acts 18:24-26). The key to “agreeing to disagree” among Southern Baptists has traditionally been maintained through a spirit of love and patience as long as the doctrines under discussion were backed up by thorough “study” and “exegesis” (i.e. thorough “break down”) of the Scriptures; not by such things as “dreams”, “visitations”, or “experiences”.

I have said all of this to you as a way of providing a basic background and foundation of which to discuss the topic of Calvinism. Calvinism has become known as a system of beliefs that explain how God saves a person’s soul and who He actually has “decreed” to be saved. Its basic premise is based on interpreting Scripture in such a way that “Calvinist” Baptists believe that God is completely “sovereign” over everything and everyone in His creation. Therefore, man can not possibly resist the “will” and/or “desire” of God. So, if God desires a person to be saved, it would be impossible for that person not to be saved, because no one can resist the sovereign will of God. Since we all know that not everyone will be saved (Matt 7:13-14, 21-23), then Calvinists believe that God could not possibly have “willed” everyone to be saved by His grace, because His sovereignty would have “caused” every one to be saved. Thus, Calvinists believe that God decided, before the world began, to save a select group of depraved sinners (called the “elect”) solely by His grace, apart from any merit (or lack of) within this select group. They also teach that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross to pay for ALL mankind, but only for ALL who are of the “elect” that *“were chosen before the foundation of the world”* (Eph 1:4).

There are other doctrines believed by Calvinist Christians (including Southern Baptists) and over the next few weeks (or months! Ha!), I will try to present you with an accurate representation of Calvinist arguments (for and against) so that you can,

for yourself, search God's Word to find the TRUTH (John 8:31-32). After you better understand the Calvinist doctrine, I will then try to show you why I believe this CAN be a "destructive" belief system and what I believe God would have Northbridge do about this as Calvinism continues to grow among Southern Baptists. In the meantime, let us trust in the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and become BEREAN Christians (read Acts 17:11)! **-Pastor Louis**