

What In The World Is Calvinism? (IX)

“Warn them before God AGAINST quarreling about words; it is of NO VALUE, and only RUINS those who listen.” 2Tim 2:14

In our efforts to understand “Calvinism” (better known as “Reformed Theology”), I previously introduced to you the basic five (5) points this system of doctrine is based upon when it comes to the salvation of a human soul. They were:

- Point 1) **T**otal “depravity” of a Human Soul – (Man is so effected by sin...He has no free will “NOT” to sin!)
- Point 2) **U**nconditional ELECTION – (Although all men deserve hell, God “elected” a few to be saved by His grace, but not all.)
- Point 3) **L**imited ATONEMENT – (When Christ died on the cross, it was to make “atonement” only for the sins of the ELECT!)
- Point 4) **I**rresistible GRACE – (God makes sure all of the “elect” are ALL saved! ALL He has “chosen” WILL accept His grace!)
- Point 5) **P**reservation of the Saints – (God ensures that the “elect” never fall from His grace. They can never lose salvation!)

Before I conclude this series of articles on Calvinism, I want you to recognize that Reformed Theology (based on “TULIP”) makes some points that I believe most Southern Baptist can agree with. For instance, I have always preached the “T” point of Calvinism. I, too, believe that the entire human race is totally depraved and unless God reaches out to a lost person...that person will always remain lost (Rom 3:10-11; John 6:44). Also, I believe the Bible confirms the “P” in “TULIP”. I also preach that whoever God draws to Jesus Christ *and gets saved by faith* can never lose their salvation (John 10:27-30; 1Thess 5:23-24).

However, where Calvinist and I part common paths of theology is when they try to use the Bible to prove their belief that Christ ONLY died for a few people (i.e. the “elect”). The “L” in “TULIP” claims that Christ’s death on the cross only ATONED for the sins of the elect. In fact, the “I” (Irresistible Grace) and the “U” (Unconditional Election) of “TULIP” would not fit reasonable theology if the “L” (Limited Atonement) was proven to be false. That’s why Calvinist will go to many “word twisting” means to explain away any verses in the bible which plainly state that Jesus Christ died for ALL MANKIND. They know that if Christ died for ALL OF HUMANITY’S SINS then salvation is offered to all humanity (i.e. there is no elect). Thus, if it can be proven that the Bible reveals the UNLIMITED ATONEMENT of mankind (i.e. Jesus died for ALL the world’s sins), then Calvinism is not an accurate system of theology.

That’s why I am sort of amazed that people who believe in “TULIP” call themselves “Calvinists”. I say this because; if you read John Calvin’s own personal commentaries on Bible, you would quickly discover that EVEN HE did not believe that Jesus died for only the sins of an “elected” few. It is John Calvin who wrote:

“I approve of the ordinary reading, that he (Jesus) alone bore the punishment of many, because on him was laid the guilt of the WHOLE WORLD. It is evident from other passages, especially from the fifth chapter of Epistle to the Romans, that ‘many’ sometimes denotes ‘all’. (Calvin’s Comments, on Isaiah 53:12)

“...So long as we are without Christ and separated from Him, nothing which He suffered and did for the SALVATION OF THE HUMAN RACE is of the least benefit to us.” (ICR, 3.1.1)

“...I reply that this is TRUE when we have men in mind; for God commends to us the SALVATION OF ALL MEN without exception, even as Christ suffered for the SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.” (Calvin’s Comments, on Galatians 5:12)

(based on Calvin’s exegesis of 1Tim 2:1-4) *“...he (Paul) adds, that it was acceptable to God, who will have ALL MEN SAVED. By this he assuredly means nothing more than that the way of salvation WAS NOT SHUT against ANY order of men; that, on the contrary, he (God) had manifested His mercy in such a way, that he would have NONE debarred from it.* (ICR, 3.24.16)

I could go on and on with quotes from JOHN CALVIN, himself, which proves that he did NOT believe in the “L” (i.e. LIMITED ATONEMENT) of the so-called “Calvinist” TULIP. Therefore, it may be inappropriate to call this system of beliefs “Calvinism” since it does not accurately portray his own clearly stated beliefs on what Jesus Christ accomplished when He went to the cross. Even John Calvin believed that “Christ died for ALL” (2Cor 5:15a) and thus “salvation” was being OFFERED TO ALL. If it is offered to all, but not all are being saved, so the only explanation for this is that some people (who Christ loved enough to die for) are foolishly using their “limited” free will to RESIST God’s grace.

This does not mean that man has “power” over the will of God, or that man can ultimately “control” his own destiny. What it does mean, is that God is such a wonderful benevolent God, that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD even though He knew in advance that MOST men were going to REJECT His offer of grace. This doesn’t elevate man’s SOVEREIGNTY over God; rather, it reveals man’s extreme SINFULNESS before an extremely loving God.

So, as we come to the end of my series on Calvinism, I hope that now you can at least understand the basics of what Calvinism is, who John Calvin was, and what’s the difference between Calvinism and traditional Southern Baptist (which I believe is “biblical”) doctrine. As I have written earlier, although I don’t agree with all of Calvinists’ “Reformed Theology” (and neither did John Calvin, himself! ha!) however, I do believe that most Calvinists are just “mistaken” brothers in Christ who are doing the best they can to serve Jesus Christ and honor God as they see fit. From what I have been able to find out, they are not even trying to cause major problems within the Southern Baptist Convention. Of course I think it is best that we all “agree” and are “unified” by TRUTH, but it is the Holy Spirit’s job to lead people into that truth (John 16:13). God, the Holy Spirit, does not need you or I to “argue” or “quarrel” over every little point of doctrine to try to MAKE people believe as we do. Instead, listen to Him and then “lovingly” and “patiently” share what He teaches you from God’s Word with others (1Pet 3:15; Eph 4:15). – **Pastor Louis**