

What In The World Is Calvinism? (VI)

“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who WANTS ALL men to be saved....” 1Timothy 2:3-4a

In my last newsletter article on Calvinism (3/25/08), I presented biblical evidence that LOVE is what motivated God’s desire to create and save mankind...more so than just His “sovereignty”. Calvinists view God’s sovereignty as being “violated” or “overpowered” if man uses his so-called “free will” to do anything that has not already been decreed by God to take place. In other words, if God wants a person saved, according to Calvinists, that person will get saved because the Creator’s will cannot be resisted or altered by his creation. Since, even Jesus said that most people will not be saved (Matt 7:13-14), Calvinists interpret this to mean that this is proof that God did NOT WANT everyone to be saved. Rather, they believe that God decreed, before the world was ever created, that of all mankind that would be created, only a FEW would be selected by God to be saved to the glory of His grace and mercy. The rest of mankind was predestined (before any person was ever created) to be eternally punished in a lake of fire to the glory of His holiness and judgment. Thus, Calvinists teach that Jesus only died for the sins of the few that were chosen by God to be saved before the world began and the gospel is God’s call that can ONLY be responded to by the “elect”.

But not even Calvinists can argue that the bible clearly states that *“God so loved THE WORLD that He gave His one and only Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him shall NOT perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but to save THE WORLD through Him.”* (John 3:16-17) These verses alone should cause us to question Calvinists beliefs by asking Scripture to reveal:

- “How MANY people in the world did God actually LOVE (agape)?”
- “Did God LOVE every person enough to send Jesus Christ to provide for EVERY sinner’s need...or just a select FEW?”
- “Did God decree that He would ONLY let a FEW respond to the gospel?”
- “Is it possible for God to CALL someone to salvation (and want them saved)...but that person refuse God’s call?”

Since Calvinists do not believe that mankind really does have a “free will”, they would answer these questions in REVERSE order. They would start by saying God WILL SAVE all He “really” calls to Himself, because it is impossible for man to resist God’s decreed will. Therefore, since only a FEW will be saved, Calvinists say that is because God only “desired” a few to be saved. This leads them to surmise that God didn’t send His Son into the world to die for ALL men’s sins...and His “agape” love for the world was always and only directed toward the “elect” in the world.

I, on the other hand, start with God’s LOVE for the world (“all of mankind”) and answer the questions above in DIRECT order. In the second chapter of his first letter to Timothy, Paul made some very clear statements when the Holy Spirit led him to write that *“God desires ALL to be saved”* (v. 4a) and *“...there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for ALL MEN...”* (vv. 5-6a). Peter adds that God is not willing that *“ANYONE should perish, but that ALL would come to repentance”* (2Pet 3:9b). John claims that Jesus is the *“atoning sacrifice for OUR (i.e. already saved) sins, and NOT ONLY FOR OURS but also for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD.”* (1Jn 2:2)

When it comes to these verses, Calvinists will not let “ALL” literally mean “all (i.e. every human being)” simply because it is not consistent with their predetermined theology that God’s SOVEREIGNTY can not ever be altered or prevented by puny mankind. Yet, Scripture is filled with instances where God has “called out” to people to repent and respond to Him, but the people refused. Israel is a great example of this. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, *“The Lord your God has chosen (i.e. “elected”) you out of ALL the peoples on the face of the earth to be HIS PEOPLE, His treasured possession.”* Yet, this same God said about Israel *“They have FORSAKEN the Lord; they have SPURNED the Holy One of Israel and TURNED their backs on Him...”* (Isaiah 1:4b) and *“While you were doing these things, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I CALLED you, but you did NOT ANSWER.”* (Jeremiah 7:13) These are just a few of the Scriptures that clearly reveal that God has indeed CALLED people (and desired people) to do certain things (i.e. repent, love Him, obey Him), but man consistently has used his own free will to reject God’s desires in his life. It can not be denied, God’s call to man has *“gone out through all the earth”* (Psalm 19:4) so man is *“without excuse”* (Rom 1:20). Man, however, would have a big “excuse”, if the only reason they didn’t respond was because God intended (i.e. willed, decreed, desired, etc.) for man to disobey Him.

Yet, some Calvinists, to protect their “sovereignty” based theology, will still go so far as to say that God INTENDED for man to disobey Him. In other words, God DECREED that man would sin! Hyper-Calvinists know that Scripture presents man as regularly sinning (i.e. rebelling against God’s will). Since they make God’s “sovereignty” a priority, they are forced to interpret all rejections of God’s call by Israel...part of God’s original plan and ultimate desire. Thus, in Calvinism, most of Israel sinned against God because He WANTED THEM TO and many people today do not respond to the “call” of the gospel because God WANTS THEM TO reject the gospel. As your pastor, I reject any interpretation of Scripture which teaches (or even hints) that God is the author of sin!

This is why Southern Baptists have traditionally interpreted the Scriptures, as they pertain to man’s salvation, to reveal that God truly does want (will, desire, etc.) ALL mankind to be saved. However, as a part of His own mysterious and “sovereign” plan, God decreed that not all men would be FORCED to be saved. Therefore, God created man with a “limited” free will. This free will does not give man the “blank check” authority to just “control” or “overthrow” the ultimate plans of God; however, God does allow mankind to use this free will to choose or reject God’s plans to “save” him and “remove his sins” from him. Thus, I believe that proper biblical interpretation will lead us to see that God does indeed “LOVE” everyone (i.e. Jn 3:16), that love was demonstrated to ALL (i.e. Rom 5:8), and that love is available to ALL (i.e. Rom 10:13), but not ALL will choose to BELIEVE (Rom 10:16-18). This makes rejecting the gospel and going to “hell” man’s choice for his eternity, not God’s! - **Pastor Louis**