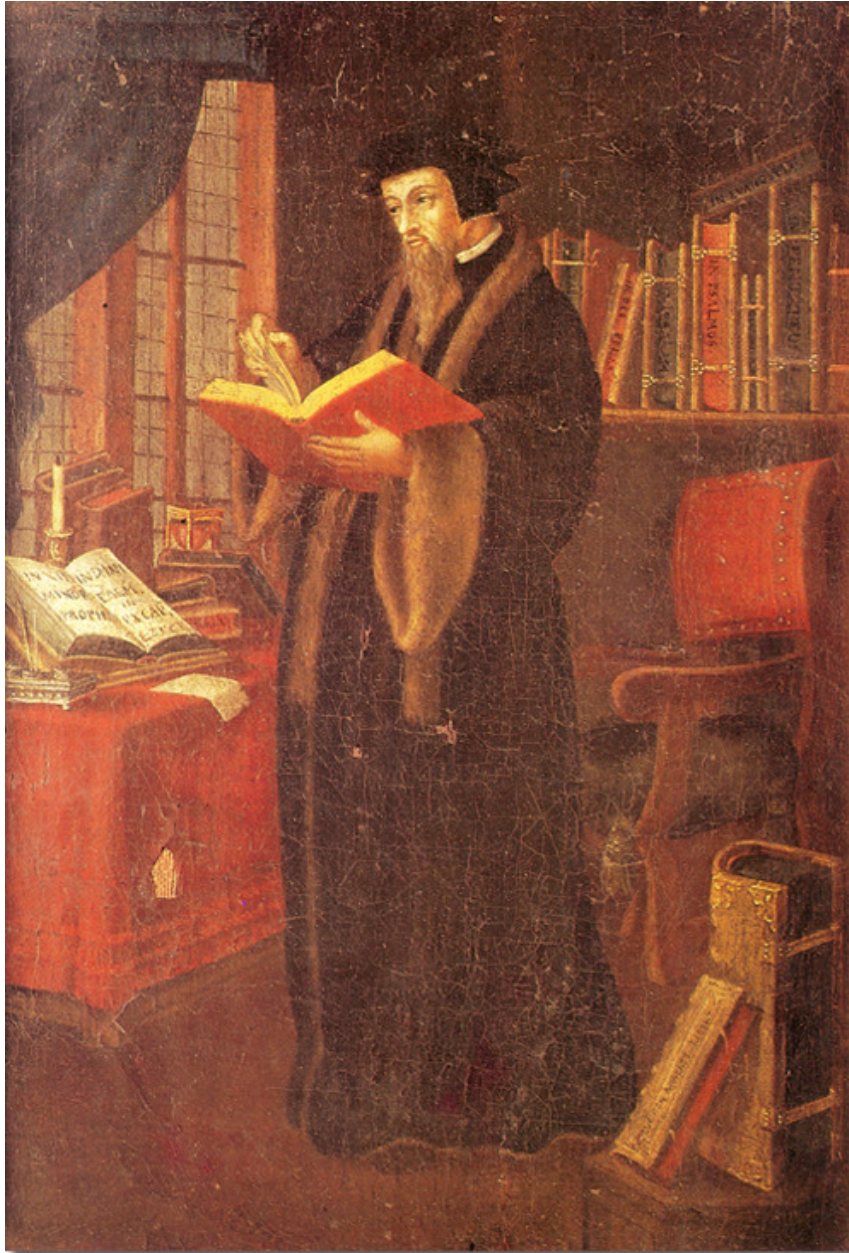


# Calvinism



**Curtis Byers**  
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## ***Preface***

This study will focus upon the teachings of John Calvin and those within the Reformed tradition. Limited attention will be given to related teachings by others within Protestantism. In the early lessons some counterpoints will be made to Calvin's teachings, but the primary goal is simply to present Calvinist's teachings.

An understanding of Calvinism is absolutely essential in order to understand the teachings of many Protestant denominations. And since Calvinism concerns itself with the basic questions of Bible revelation, a true understanding of Scriptures' teachings regarding these questions is necessary for all Christians.

- Lesson 1*** Calvinism: An Introduction
- Lesson 2*** The Sovereignty of God
- Lesson 3*** ***T*** – Total Depravity
- Lesson 4*** ***U*** – Unconditional Election
- Lesson 5*** ***L*** – Limited Atonement
- Lesson 6*** ***I*** – Irresistible Grace
- Lesson 7*** ***P*** – Perseverance of the Elect

Curtis Byers  
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*Front Cover*

**Unknown Artist, Calvin**

<http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/publications/calvin-biblio>

**What is Calvinism?**

Calvinism is that body of teachings put forth by John Calvin and held by the "Reformed Churches". Calvin's teachings are systematically presented in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and are traditionally summarized as the 'Five Points of Calvinism' presented in the form of the acrostic TULIP. [The 'Five Points of Calvinism' originated with the Synod of Dort in 1618 as a response to the 'Five Points of Arminianism'.]

- T** – Total Depravity
- U** – Unconditional Election
- L** – Limited Atonement
- I** – Irresistible Grace
- P** – Perseverance of the Elect

Like most doctrines, Calvinism has changed some over the centuries, i.e. Calvin did not teach everything which is generally recognized as Calvinism today. The changes are reflected in the various creeds created by the "Reformed Churches".

**Why Study Calvinism?**

Fact: Calvin was the foremost theologian of the Protestant Reformation.

Hence: Calvin's influence is felt to varying degrees in all Protestant denominations.

Thus: We must study

1. To test our beliefs,
2. To guard ourselves against false teaching, and
3. To better understand other's beliefs in our efforts to teach them.

**Religious Background**

Prior to the sixteenth century, the Christian world was divided into two major groups: Roman Catholic (Western Europe) and Greek Orthodox (Eastern Europe, Middle East). [The division between these Catholic bodies formally took place in 1054 (the Great Schism), but they had for centuries disagreed over the claims of the Roman bishop as pope.]

Two early attempts to reform the abuses with the Roman Catholic Church occurred under John Wyclif (1329-84) and the Lollards in England and John Hus (1369-1415) and the Hussites in Bohemia.

Luther and Zwingli independently sought to reform corrupt practices within the Roman Catholic Church, although the Reformation is usually said to start with Luther's 95 theses. Neither man initially desired to break with the Roman Catholic Church, hence

the term 'reformation'. John Calvin was influenced by both of these reformers as well as Martin Bucer. His contribution lied in his ability to systematize the teachings of the reformers into a united whole. He first published his Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536, but continued to edit this work until 1559.

## **Reformers**

### **Martin Luther** (1483-1546)

1. German Monk.
2. Inner struggle over being assured of his salvation led to his understanding of justification by faith.
3. 95 Theses attacking indulgences (1517).
4. Excommunicated by the Diet of Worms (1521), but in the meantime had received vast support throughout Germany, especially among the princes.
5. Translated the Bible into German.

### **Ulrich Zwingli** (1484-1531)

1. Swiss priest (Zurich).
2. Deeply influenced by the humanist, Erasmus.
3. "Radical" reformer in that he stressed the authority of the Scriptures to the point that he denounced whatever was not expressly warranted in them. Luther, on the other hand, only denounced what was specifically denounced in Scripture.
4. Strongly disagreed with Luther over the nature of the Lord's Supper. [Luther believed in the actual presence of Christ in the emblems; Zwingli viewed the emblems as symbols of Christ's spiritual presence.]
5. Viewed the church and state as a single unity governed both by lay magistrates.
6. Died on the battlefield in a war between the Catholics and Protestants.

### **John Calvin** (1509-1564)

1. French lawyer/theologian.
2. Influenced by Reformation efforts in Germany.
3. Forced to flee Paris as result of his preaching (1533). Shortly thereafter published first edition of the Institutes. Many of his teachings originated with others, but he possessed the ability to systematically organized the teachings into a united theology.
4. "By chance" located in Geneva, Switzerland where he was able to create a local government and society based upon moral principles he espoused.
5. Founded a university within Geneva through which he promoted the protestant cause throughout Europe.

***Contributing Factors for the Success of the Reformation***

1. Political circumstances. (German estates within the Holy Roman Empire were independently minded. The resistance to Charles V resulted in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 which granted toleration to protestant groups in regions where they were in the majority.)
2. Renaissance – humanism.
3. Printing press.
4. Catholic abuses.

***Major Protestant Reformation Groups***

1. Lutheran – Germany, Scandinavia.
2. Reformed or Calvinistic – Switzerland, Netherlands, parts of France, Scotland (John Knox).
3. Anglican – England.

***Common Elements within Protestantism***

1. "Justification by grace through faith".
2. Authority of Scripture.
3. "Priesthood" of all believers.
4. Sacraments – Baptism and Lord's Supper.

**Introduction** "In all places, in all times, from eternity to eternity, Calvinism sees God." [Bayne, quoted by Boettner, p.18]. From this vantage point, the Calvinist interprets all scripture.

### **The Calvinist View**

#### **I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE**

A. "...but we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed." [Calvin, 1.16.8]

B. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

"God ... is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth." [Chapter II, Section II]

"God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." [Chapter III, Section I]

"Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions?" [Chapter III, Section II]

C. "Reformed theology stresses the sovereignty of God in virtue of which He has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass, and works His sovereign will in His entire creation, both natural and spiritual, according to His pre-determined plan." [Berkhof, p.100]

#### **II. GOD'S GOVERNMENT**

A. God Rules According to His Plan: "In His government there is necessarily implied a plan; in the all-pervasiveness and perfection of His government is inevitably implied an all-inclusive and perfect plan." [Warfield, *BTS*, p.273]

B. Characteristics of God's Plan

1. According to his sovereign will. Ps.135:6; Dan.4:35; Eph.1:11

2. Predetermined from all eternity. Is.46:9-10; Mt.25:34; Ac.15:18; Eph.1:4;

2 Thess.2:13; 2 Tim.1:9; 1 Pet.1:20

b. Extends to every event in time.

- b. "...a plan broad enough to embrace the whole universe of things, minute enough to concern itself with the smallest details, and actualizing itself with inevitable certainty in every event that comes to pass." [Warfield, BTS, p.276]
- b. "...all such happenings, whether prosperous or adverse, ...are governed by God's secret plan." [Calvin, 1.16.2]
- c. "...it is certain that not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command." [Calvin, 1.16.5]

C. God's Plan Executed by His Providence

- b. Role of providence: "God ... doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things; from the greatest even to the least, by his most holy providence..." [Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) Chapter V, Section I]

2. Extent of God's Providence [Boettner, pp.35-41]

- b. General: Neh.9:6; Ac.17:28; Col.1:17; Heb.1:3
- b. Nature: Nahum 1:3; Amos 4:7
- c. Animal Creation: Dan.6:22; Gen.31:9; Mt.6:26; 10:29
- d. Nations: Dan.2:21; 4:17; Is.40:15; Amos 3:6; Hab.1:6
- e. Men: Prov.21:1; 16:9; Ps.37:23; Dan.3:17; Is.64:8
  - b. Free acts: Phil.2:13; Ezek.36:27
  - ii. Evil acts: Ex.14:17; 2 Sam.16:10-11; Jn.19:11; Ac.4:27-28
- f. Chance events: Ac.1:24-26; Job 36:32; 1 Kg.22:28, 34

D. God's Plan Related to His Attributes

b. Omniscience

b. Implies Foreknowledge

- b. Foreknowledge based on foreordination: "If God only foresaw human events, and did not also dispose and determine them by his decision, then there would be some point in raising this question: whether his foreseeing had anything to do with their necessity. ...he foresees future events only

by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place ..." [Calvin, 3.23.6]

2. Omnipotence: Basis of providence

b. Immutability

b. Jas.1:17; Is.14:24; 46:10-11; Num.23:19; Ma1.3:6

b. Implies God's Plan is immutable: "To suppose that God has a multitude of plans, and that he changes his plan with the exigencies of the situation, is to make him infinitely dependent upon the varying wills of his creatures, and to deny him one necessary element of perfection, namely, immutability." [Strong, p.359]

**Counterpoints: The Calvinist View Reviewed**

1. All must agree that God is sovereign, and it is true that God has willed (decreed) certain things. But must God have decreed all things in order to be sovereign? Doesn't the very fact that he is sovereign give him freedom with regard to the extent of his decrees? In other words, couldn't God sovereignly determine to leave some things undetermined.
2. Calvinists present their view as the biblical view by noting the many passages extolling the majesty, power, wisdom, etc. of God, but the biblical passages do not necessitate their conclusion. Their conclusion is a philosophical conclusion, not a biblical one. That is not to say that we are not to use our 'reasoning' abilities, rather truth must come from revelation. [A note of caution: Many responses given to the Calvinists are also philosophical in nature. Such responses are appropriate to demonstrate that the conclusions of the Calvinists are not necessary, but are not appropriate in ascertaining truth in and of itself.]
  - a. Concerning foreknowledge:
    - b. Does God foreknow all events? Cannot dismiss passages such as Gen.6:5-7; 18:20-21; 22:12; Ex.32:10; 1 Sam.15:11(29); Jer.7:31; 19:5; 32:35 by simply saying they are anthropomorphisms. Even if they are, they must represent some truth about God and his relationship to man.
    - c. Even if God does know all events, is it necessarily because he has foreordained them? Why couldn't God foresee free events? To say that God could not would limit his omniscience. The Calvinist would argue the impossibility of free acts being foreseeable, but certainly it is no more impossible than the belief of Calvinists that predetermined acts are free (the Calvinist view of free-will will be studied later.) So much for the philosophical side, what does scripture say? "In the only two passages (that I know of) which discuss both foreknowledge and foreordination (or election), foreknowledge comes first (see Rom.8:28-30 and 1 Pet.1:1-2).



**Introduction** Most Protestant groups share the belief that, in some sense, man's nature is corrupted because of the sin of Adam. The exact means by which this took place is debated, even among Calvinists. The view did not, however, originate with Protestantism, but can be traced back to the early centuries of Christianity, especially to Augustine in his controversy with Pelagius.

### **The Calvinist View**

#### **I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE**

A. "Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' (Gal.5:19)." [Calvin, 2.1.8]

B. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

"By this sin they (Adam and Eve, *cb*) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all faculties and parts of the soul and body." [Chapter VI, Section II]

"They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." [Chapter VI, section III]

"From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions." [Chapter VI, section IV]

"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 prepare himself thereunto." [Chapter IX, Section III]

#### **II. EXPLANATION OF THE DOCTRINE**

A. Doctrine Does Not Mean:

1. Man's conscience is destroyed or corrupted. [Dabney, p.323]
2. All men are equally bad, or as bad as possible. [Boettner, p.61]
3. Man is not capable of doing natural, civil, or external religious good. [Berkhof, p.247]

B. Doctrine Does Mean: [Dabney, p.323-234]

1. "No natural man has any true love for God as a spiritual, holy, true, good, and righteous Sovereign." (Jn.5:42; Titus 1:15)
2. Man, in doing evil and 'good' acts, is motivated by wrong principles without moral regard for God.
3. Man is totally unable to do anything resulting in his salvation. (Jn.1:13; 3:5; 6:44; 8:34; 15:4-5; Rom.7:18, 23-24; 8:7-8; 1 Cor.2:14; 2 Cor.3:5; Eph.2:1, 8-10; 4:18; Heb.11:6) Note: Some Calvinists prefer the term 'total inability' instead of 'total depravity'.

### III. THE FALL OF ADAM

#### A. Adam Chose to Sin

1. Created holy and placed in sin-free world.
2. Choice was a free act.

#### B. The Relation of Adam to Succeeding Generations [see Bruner, p.90-213]

1. Realism or Natural Headship (Augustine's view followed by W.G.T. Shedd and A.H. Strong)
  - a. "By the evil will of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom, therefore, they individually derived original sin." [Augustine, as quoted by Bruner, p.93]
  - b. "According to the higher realism...the human race constituted a numerical unity with Adam in his generic nature, which was later on individualized by a series of abscissions from the original one. Just as the first oak tree contained all future oaks and the first pair of lions contained all the generations of lions, so Adam, the first man, contained the essence of all other men." [Bruner, p.96-97]
2. Federal Headship (originated with later Calvinist theologians, e.g., Hodge, Boettner, Dabney, et.al.)
  - a. "The idea is that God appointed Adam the federal head or representative of the whole race. God entered into a covenant with Adam, agreeing to bless him and his children with eternal life if he obeyed the probationary statute (Gen.2:17), and to penalize both him and them if he disobeyed. Adam violated the covenant, and in his transgression we all sinned; that is, God holds every member of Adam's race guilty of his sin." [Bruner, p.111]
  - b. Scripture teaches representative principle: Gen.1:22, 28; 3:15-19; 9:3; Ex.34:6,7; 20:5; Josh.7:25; 1 Sam.15:2; 2 Sam.21:1-9; Heb.7:10-11

- c. Guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to succeeding generations [see Dabney, p.329-331; Boettner, p.75-78; Berkhof, p.245]
  - d. Distinction made between reatus culpae (guilt of blame) and reatus poenae (guilt of punishment) saying it was only the latter that was imputed to the race.
  - e. Reformed theology sees two primary covenants that God has made with man: the covenant of works which he made with Adam, and the covenant of grace he has made with his posterity.
3. Positions held by Advocates of Realism and Federal Headship.
- a. Both groups hold that natural heredity provides the mode for transmitting Adam's sinful nature to the human race.
    - i. Like produces like: "Therefore, all of us, who have descended from impure seed, are born infected with the contagion of sin." [Calvin, 2.1.5]
    - ii. Scripture: Ps.51:5; Job 14:4; Eph.2:3
  - b. Romans 5:12 (the fundamental passage for all variants of Calvinism, *cb*)
    - i. Realists emphasize the phrase "because all sinned", i.e. personally sinned with Adam.
    - ii. Federalists emphasize the analogy between Adam and Christ. Since in their view man's justification on the basis of faith is a 'judicial' act, so man's condemnation is also a 'judicial' act.

#### IV. FREE WILL OF MAN

##### A. Free will with Reference to Sin of Adam

- 1. Adam fell due to his own will: "In this integrity man by free will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life... Therefore Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will. But it was because his will was capable of being bent to one side or the other, and was not given the constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell." [Calvin, 1.15.8]
- 2.. However, the fall of Adam was foreordained: "And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision." [Calvin, 3.23.7]

##### B. Free Will with Reference to Original Sin and the Eternal Decrees of God

- 1. Calvinists contend that since the fall, man does not have free will in the absolute sense, because his depraved nature disables him from choosing

good.

- a. "(Man) has not the free power of choosing between good and evil – which is called free will." [Calvin, as quoted by Curry, p.71]
  - b. "I...can understand nothing else than that Free-Will is an empty term, whose reality is lost." [Luther, as quoted by Boettner, p.213]
  - c. "In his fallen state he has only what we may call 'the freedom of slavery'. He is in bondage to sin and spontaneously follows Satan." [Boettner, p.213]
2. Yet, this isn't meant to imply that man, either because of his inherited nature or the eternal decrees of God, is compelled to do evil, but that he freely does evil in accordance with his nature, and therefore responsible.
- a. "God's mode of effectuating His purposes as to the acts of free agents, is not by compelling their acts or wills, contrary to their preferences and dispositions; either secretly or openly; but by operating through their dispositions." [Dabney, p.121]
  - b. "God so governs the inward feelings, external environments, habits, desires, motives, etc., of man that they freely do what he purposes." [Boettner, p.214]

### ***Counterpoints: The Calvinist View Reviewed***

1. The very fact that the Calvinists are so divided over the basis on which man is depraved indicates the lack of scriptural support anyone group can find for their view. One particular interesting example is Albert Barnes, the Presbyterian commentator (see his comments on Romans 5, and the editor's response). He strongly disagreed with the Calvinist view of depravity and was tried for heresy. That event precipitated a division between the 'Old School' and 'New School' among the Presbyterian theologians [Hutchinson, p.16ff]. But, the fact that man is depraved is essential for their overall system (more on this later).
2. It is nonsensical to say that Adam had free will when he was simply doing what God had foreordained him to do. The reason the Calvinist insists on the free will of Adam is that it in some ways mitigates the harshness of all being born in a depraved state.
3. Calvinists' interpretation of Romans 5:12ff doesn't do justice to the parallel being established between Adam and Christ. If all men are condemned in Adam, then why aren't all men made alive in Christ instead of just the elect? The inherent universalism in such a parallel is usually denied by insisting that being made alive is conditional upon faith. Using the same reasoning, why can't we say also that being condemned in Adam is conditional upon each man actually sinning?
4. The case of children dying in infancy has been a hard spot for many Calvinists. Calvin was consistent in his views and argued that both elect and non-elect infants

died, and that the non-elect ones would be consigned to hell on the basis of the sinful nature that they inherited. Others have argued that either (a) only elect infants die [Rice in Campbell-Rice debate], or that (b) God will extend a special act of mercy to them [Strong].

5. Infant baptism was long practiced by the Roman Catholics prior to the reformation. Catholics saw infant baptism as overcoming the harmful effects of original sin. The Reformers continued the practice of infant baptism, but they could not argue that it regenerated the infant, because that would depend upon God's foreordination. Therefore, they justified it as a sign of the covenant in much the same way that circumcision was a sign of the covenant with the children of Israel. Some have argued, however, that only elect infants are baptized. [See comments by Forster, p.270ff].
6. Most theologians, even Arminians, argue that man's nature was in some way corrupted by the Fall of Adam even if they do not go to the extent of affirming total depravity. But there seems to be problems even with this view. Why can't each man be born into the exact same state as Adam and Eve were created?

**Introduction** Calvin, again following Augustine, believed that when the scriptures spoke of election, that unconditional, individual election was to be understood. This conclusion is not necessary, and it is contrary to other plain teachings in the scriptures.

### **The Calvinist View**

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

A. "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others." [Calvin, 3.21.5]

B. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

"Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace." [Chapter III, Section V]

"The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his 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." [Chapter III, Section VII]

#### II. ELECTION

A. Necessarily Has All the Characteristics of God's Plan; i.e. based on his sovereign will, predetermined from all eternity, immutable, etc.

B. Purpose (See comments on Eph.1:3-14 by W.Hendrickson and W.Barclay)

1. Elect should be holy. Eph.1:3,4; Rom.11:7-11; 2 Th.2:13

2. Give glory to God. Eph.1:6,12,14

C. Nature of Election

1. Involves particular individuals: "As over against all attempts to conceive the operations of God looking to salvation universalistically, that is as directed to mankind in the mass, Calvinism insists that the saving operations of God are

directed in every case immediately to the individuals who are saved. Particularism in the process of salvation becomes the mark of Calvinism." [Warfield, *Plan*, p. 87]

2. Not Based on Foreseen Good Works; i.e. unconditional:
  - a. Necessary so that foreordination precedes foreknowledge.
  - b. Good works are the result of election [see Westminster Confession, Chapter 15; Calvin 3.22.3] 1 Tim.2:9; Jn.15:16; Eph.2:10; Col.1:12
- D. Means of Election: God's Irresistible Grace (more later)
- E. "Three Chief Passages" [Warfield, *BTS*, p.310ff]
  1. Romans 8:29-30
  2. Romans 9 – 11
  3. Ephesians 1:1-12
- F. Significance of Doctrine for the Believer [Packer, *New Bible Dictionary*, p.360]
  1. "It shows him that his salvation, first to last, is all of God, a fruit of sovereign discriminating mercy."
  2. "It assures the believer of his eternal security, and removes all grounds of fear and despondency."
  3. "It spurs the believer to ethical endeavor...(Col.3:12-17)"
- G. Implied by Original Sin: "We are by nature ungodly, hostile to God, and His law, blind in mind, and certainly determined to worldliness in preference to godliness, by a native disposition. Hence, no man cometh to Christ, except the Father who hath sent Him draw him. Unless some power above man made the difference between the believer and unbeliever, it would never virtually appear. But if God makes it, He does it of purpose, and that purpose must be eternal. Hence, no intelligent mind which admits original sin, denies election. The two doctrines stand or fall together." [Dabney, p.225]

### III. REPROBATION [Berkhof, p.116]

- A. Two Elements (Dabney only recognizes the first element, p.239)
  1. Preterition: the determination to pass some by.
  2. Condemnation: the determination to punish man for their sin.
- B. Distinction Between the Elements

1. Preterition is a sovereign act of God not based on demerits of man; condemnation is a judicial act, visiting sin with punishment.
  2. Reason for preterition unknown; reason for condemnation is sin.
  3. Preterition is simply passive; condemnation is positive.
- C. Prov.16:4; Rom.1:28; 2:5 (see v.6!); 2 Thess.2:11; 1 Pet.2:8; Jude 4; Rev.17:17

#### IV. COMPARATIVE NUMBER OF ELECT AND REPROBATE

##### A. Calvinistic System Does Not Demand That Only Few Are Elect

1. "No doubt many Calvinists, like many not Calvinists, have, in obedience to the supposed teachings of the Scriptures, held that few will be saved, but there is no good reason why Calvinists may not believe that the saved will ultimately embrace the immensely greater portion of the human race. At any rate, our leading theologians – Charles Hodge, Robert L. Dabney, W.G.T.Shedd, and B.B.Warfield – have so held." [S.G.Craig, as quoted by Boettner, p.132]
2. "...but from the beginning [God] has had in view the restoration to Himself of the Whole world." [Warfield, *BTS*, p.328]
3. Boettner argues at length that the world is progressively getting better and that ultimately the elect will fill the earth. [See p.130-143]

B. Possible Reason to Believe in the Greater Number of the Elect: "At the same time it relieves the solemnity and awfulness which overhangs the decree of reprobation, to remember that the Scriptures teach that the number of the elect is much greater than that of the non-elect." [W.G.T.Shedd, as quoted by Boettner, p.130-131]

C. Mt.7:14f; Lk.13:23f; Mt.20:16; 22:14 [Warfield argues that statement only applies to the time of Jesus, *BTS*, art. "Are They Few That Be Saved?", p.333-350]

#### **Counterpoints: The Calvinist View Reviewed**

1. With regard to election, there are three possibilities:
  - a. Unconditional, individual election (the Calvinist view)
  - b. Conditional, individual election (the Arminian view)
  - c. Conditional, corporate election (the Biblical view?)

[I do not know of anyone who believes the fourth possibility: unconditional,



corporate election.]

2. The idea behind corporate election, is that the "body" of elect was chosen "in Christ" who is the "elect one" of God. In other words, it was Christ who was elected by God, and then Christians on the condition of their faith in Christ are elected in him. Hence the repeated emphasis in Ephesians chapter 1 of "in Christ". [This view is convincingly argued by Robert Shanks (*Elect in the Son*) and Forster and Marston.]
3. Calvinists usually point to the case of Pharaoh or God's selection of Jacob over Esau to support the idea of unconditional, individual election. Such an election in their case may be true, but that election was not for the purpose of their eternal salvation, but for some particular purpose of God.

**Introduction** The Calvinist view of the extent of the atonement is, for the most part, a logical extension of their views on election. But their logic is not always compelling; Calvin himself did not teach a 'limited' atonement. "The question of the 'extent of the atonement', as it has awkwardly been called, is one of the most difficult in the whole range of Calvinistic Theology. That man who should profess to see no force in the objections to our views, would only betray the shallowness of his mind and knowledge." [Dabney, p.518-519]

### **The Calvinist View**

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

##### A. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

" ... Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only." [Chapter III, Section VI]

"Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf..." [Chapter XI, Section III]

"God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification..." [Chapter XI, Section IV]

##### B. "The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect, and the elect only. This is equivalent to saying that He died for the purpose of saving only those to whom He actually applies the benefits of His redemptive work." [Berkhof, p.394]

#### II. CLARIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINE

##### A. The Issue is Not Whether: [Berkhof, p.393]

1. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to save all men – this is admitted by all.
2. The saving benefits are actually applied to every man – only the universalists believe they are.
3. A bona fide offer of salvation is made to all that hear the gospel.
4. Any of the fruits of Christ's death benefit the non-elect through the

association with the elect.

5. The Issue is: "Was the sacrifice of Christ merely intended to make salvation of all men possible, or was it intended to render certain the salvation of those who had been given to Him by the Father." [Boettner, p.150]

### III. PROOFS FOR THE DOCTRINE

- A. From the Doctrine of Unconditional Election: "If from eternity God has planned to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a contradiction to say that His work has equal reference to both portions, or that He sent His Son to die for those whom He predestined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense He was sent to die for those whom He had chosen for salvation." [Boettner, p. 151]
- B. From the Immutability of God's Purposes: "If God ever intended to save any soul in Christ, ... that soul will certainly be saved. In.10:27,28; 6:37-40. Hence, all whom God ever intended to save in Christ will be saved. But some souls will never be saved; therefore, some souls God never intended to be saved by Christ's atonement." [Dabney, p.521]
- C. From the Extent of Christ's Intercessory Work: "The sacrificial work of Christ and His intercessory work are simply two different aspects of His atoning work, and therefore the scope of one can be no wider than the other. Now Christ very differently limits His intercessory work...Jn.17:9." [Berkhof, p.395] (See Dabney, p.522 and Rom. 8:34)
- D. From positive Statements of Scriptures: "Those for whom He suffered and died are variously called 'His sheep', Jn.10:11,15, 'His Church', Acts 20:28; Eph.5:25-27, 'His people', Mt.1:21, and 'the elect', Rom.8:32-35." [Berkhof, p.395]
- E. From the Very Fact That Some will Be Saved:
  1. "When the atonement is made universal its inherent value is destroyed. If it is applied to all men, and if some are lost, the conclusion is that it makes salvation objectively possible for all but that it does not actually save anybody." [Boettner, p.152]
  2. "If we universalize the extent we limit the efficacy. If some of those for whom the atonement was made and redemption wrought perish eternally, then the atonement is not itself efficacious." [Murray, *Redemption*, p.64]
  3. "If it does nothing for any man that it does not do for all men why, then, it is obvious that it saves no man; for clearly not all men are saved. The things that we have to choose between are an atonement of high value, or an atonement of wide extension. The two cannot go together. ....it universalizes the atonement at the cost of its intrinsic value, and Calvinism demands a really substantive atonement which actually saves." [B.B.Warfield, *Plan*, p.95-96]

- F. From the nature of a Ransom: "...Mt.20:28. Notice this verse does not say he gave his life a ransom for all, but for many. The nature of a ransom is such that when paid and accepted it automatically frees the persons for whom it was intended... If the ... death of Christ was a ransom for all men..., then the merits of His work must be communicated to all alike and the penalty of eternal punishment cannot be justly inflicted on any." [Boettner, p.155].
- G. From the Fact that Those for Whom Christ Died Have Themselves Also Died in Christ: "The inference is inevitable that those for whom Christ died are those and those only who die to sin and live to righteousness." [Murray, *Redemption*, p.70] (Reference is made to Rom.6:3-11; 2 Cor.5:14,15; Eph.2:4-7; and Col.3:3)

**Introduction** The Calvinist view of God's grace results from their view of man. If man is unable to respond to God's grace (because of his depravity), God must enable him to respond. On the other hand, if man has free will, he is capable of freely accepting God's grace.

### **The Calvinist View**

#### **I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE**

##### **A. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):**

"All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willingly by his grace." [Chapter X, Section I]

"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." [Chapter X, Section II]

#### **II. THE GRACE OF GOD**

##### **A. Common Grace [Berkhof, p.432-446; Boettner, p.178-181]**

1. "When we speak of 'common grace', we have in mind, either (a) those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted; or, (b) those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good, to Him." [Berkhof, p.436]

2. Includes the External Call of the Gospel [Berkhof, p.454-464]

- a. Universal in nature, e.g. the great commission.
- b. A bona fide calling (see Dabney, p.555-556).
- c. Elements of the external call:

- i. Presentation of gospel facts.
  - ii. Invitation to accept Christ in repentance and faith.
  - iii. A promise of forgiveness and salvation.
- d. Significance (See also Dabney, p.555-556):
- i. Divinely appointed means of gathering the elect.
  - ii. Expresses God's benevolence in dissuading all from sin.
  - iii. Shows more clearly the terribleness of sin thereby clearing God of any unjust charge (see Calvin, 2.5.5)

## B. Special Grace: The Elements Involved

### 1. Regeneration [Berkhof, p.468-469; Boettner, p.165,172]

- a. "Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy, and the first exercise of this new disposition is secured." [Berkhof, p.469]
- b. It is an instantaneous change in the sub-conscious that is never directly perceived by man.
- c. Affects the whole man: the intellect (1 Cor.2:14-15; 2 Cor.4:6; Eph.1:18); the will (Ps.110:3; Phil.2:13; Heb.13:21); the emotions (1 Pet.1:8; Mt.5:4)
- d. Necessary due to man's depravity.
- e. Ezek.11:19; In.1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom.9:16

### 2. Internal (Effectual) Call

- a. "The other kind of call is special, which he designs for the most part to give to believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts. Yet sometimes he also causes those whom he illumines only for a time to partake of it; then he justly forsakes them on account of their ungratefulness and strikes them with even greater blindness." [Calvin, 3.24.8]
- b. "Works by moral suasion (through the gospel, *cb*) plus the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit." [Berkhof, p.554]
- c. Operates in the conscious life of an individual.
- d. Distinction between the two calls in scripture: Rom.8:28, 30; 11:29;

Mt.22:14

- e. Is the internal call necessary? "The scriptures are plain in declaring that under ordinary circumstances those who have not Christ and the Gospel are lost... We do not deny that God can save some even adult heathen people if He chooses to do so; for His Spirit works when and where and how He pleases, with means or without means. If any such are saved, however, it is by a miracle of pure grace." [Boettner, p.119]
- f. Relation to Scripture:
  - 1. "Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rests upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the spirit." [Calvin, 1.7.5]
  - 2. "But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known." [Calvin, 1.8.13] (Note: This view is the logical outcome of the doctrine of faith only, see P.Roberts, "Resurrection in Modern Theology," *Resurrection*, p.129)
- 3. Conversion
  - a. "Conversion comprises the characteristics both of repentance and of faith. Repentance is conversion viewed from its starting point, the turning from the former life; faith indicates the objective point of conversion, the turning to God." [Jacobs, "Conversion", *ISBE*, II, p.707]
  - b. Repentance
    - i. An intellectual element: Rom.3:20; cf.1:32
    - ii. An emotional element: 2 Cor.7:9-10; Mt.27:3-5
    - iii. A volitional element: Acts 2:38; Rom.2:4
  - c. Faith [Berkhof, p.501-503; Dabney, p.600-601]
    - i. Four kinds:
      - Historical – intellectual apprehension of truth
      - Miraculous – persuasion wrought in mind of person that a miracle will be performed by him or in his behalf
      - Temporal – not rooted in a regenerated heart (Mt.13:20-21)
      - Saving – rooted in regenerated heart
    - ii. Saving faith is a gift of God [cf. Calvin, 2.3.8]
  - d. Conversion not absolutely necessary, e.g. case of infants. [Berkhof,

p.490]

4. Justification [see Berkhof, p.S13-S24]
  - a. "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sin, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone." [Larger Catechism, answer to Question 70]
  - b. A judicial act, whereas, regeneration, conversion, and sanctification are acts of renewal.
  - c. Elements of justification:
    - i. Negative: the remission of sins
    - ii. Positive: the adoption as children and right to eternal life.
  - d. Basis of justification:
    - i. Faith is the instrumental cause.
    - ii. The ground of justification found in the doctrine of imputation: "...three several acts of imputation were established and expounded. These are the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity; the imputation of the sins of His people to the Redeemer; the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to His people." [Warfield, *BTS*, p.263]
    - iii. Rom.3:24; 10:4; 1 Cor.1:30; 2 Cor.5:21; Phil.3:9
  - e. Harmony of Paul and James, cf. Rom.3-4 and Jas.2:14f.
    - i. Speaking to different audiences: Paul to Jewish legalists; James to the Antinomians whose faith was mere intellectual assent to truth.
    - ii. James in v.21-24 not speaking of justification of sinner, but of believer. Abraham was a believer when he offered up Isaac.
5. Sanctification
  - a. "Sanctification is a process through which the remains of sin in the outward life are gradually removed, so that, as the Shorter Catechism says, we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to love unto righteousness ... (It) is not fully completed until death, at which time the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul of every vestige of sin, making it holy and raising it above even the possibility of sinning." [Boettner, p.172]
  - b. Enables one to perform good works: Jn.15:5,8; Rom.7:4; 8:12,13;



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Gal.6:2; Jas.2:14,17,20-22; 1 Cor.10:31.

**Introduction** If God foreordains specific individuals, the elect, to salvation, then it necessarily follows that it is impossible for those individuals to be lost, hence they will not fall away once they have been justified.

**The Calvinist View**

I. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

A. " ... but Christ does not allow any of those whom he has once for all engrafted into his body to perish (John 10:28); for in preserving their salvation he will perform what he has promised - namely, he will show forth God's power, which is greater than all' (John 10:29)." [Calvin, 3.22.7]

B. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

"They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." [Chapter XVII, Section I]

"This perseverance of the saints, depends, not upon; their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof." [Chapter XVII, Section II]

II. PROOF OF THE DOCTRINE

A. From Scripture: Jn.10:27-29; Rom.11:29; Phil.1:6; 2 Thess.3:3; 2 Tim.1:12; 4:18; 1 Cor.6:19

B. From the Doctrine of Unconditional Election: "This doctrine does not stand alone, but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved." [Boettner, p.182]

C. From the Freedom of God's Election Love: "This sovereign and unmerited love is the cause of the believer's effectual calling. Jer.31:3; Rom.8:30. Now as the cause is unchangeable, the effect will be unchangeable. That effect is the constant communication of grace to the believer in whom God hath begun a good work." [Dabney, p.690]

D. From the Efficacy of Christ's Merit and Intercession:

1. "Can one who has been fully justified in Christ, whose sins have been blotted out...by the perfect and efficacious price paid by Jesus Christ, become again unjustified, and fall under condemnation without a dishonour done to Christ's righteousness." [Dabney, p.691]
  2. "Now there is no doubt, when Christ prays for all the elect...that their faith may never fall (Lk.22:32) ... that they are out of danger of falling away because the Son of God, asking that their godliness be kept constant, did not suffer a refusal." [Calvin, 3.24.6]
- E. From the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "Every Christian at the hour he believes, is so united to Christ, that he partakes of His indwelling spirit. This union is a permanent one...1 Jn.2:27. His (the Holy Spirit, *cb*) regenerating operations are spoken of as a 'seal' and an 'earnest' of our redemption. Eph.1:13,14; 2 Cor.1:22. The use of a seal is to ratify a covenant, and make fulfillment of it certain to both parties. An 'earnest'...is a small portion of the thing covenanted, given in advance, as a certain intention to bestow the whole, at the promised time." [Dabney, p.692]
- F. From the Doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption: "In the covenant of redemption God gave His people to His Son as the reward for the latter's obedience and suffering. This reward was fired from eternity... God does not go back on His promise, and therefore it is impossible that they who are reckoned as being in Christ...can be separated from Him, (Rom.8:38-39)... " [Berkhof, p.547]

### III. SIN AND THE ELECT

#### A. The Elect Can Sin

1. "This doctrine of Perseverance does not mean that Christians do temporarily fall victims of sin, for alas, this is all too common..." [Boettner, p.187]
2. "Nor do we teach that all Christians have equal spiritual vitality at all times; but they may fall into partial errors of doctrine, coldness, and sin..." [Dabney, p.689]

#### B. Sin Will Not Be Imputed to the Elect

#### C. Regenerated Nature Within the Elect Will Remain (see Dabney, p.695; Berkhof, p.546)

### IV. ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

- A. "All the Christians may and should know that they are among those who have been predestinated to eternal life." [Boettner, p.308]
- B. But All the Elect May Not Have This Assurance: "...that the assurance of hope is not of the essence of saving faith; so that many believers may be justified though not having the former: and may remain long without it." [Dabney, p.702]

- C. Even the Reprobate May Have a False Assurance: "...yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgment they do not in any way differ from the elect (cf. Acts 13:48)." [Calvin, 3.2.11]
- D. Therefore, Assurance Results From Self-Examination
1. "Since these certain marks of salvation are laid down in scripture (reference made to Rom.8:16; 1 Jn.2:29; 3:14, 24, 26; 5:1, 10-13; 1 Thess.1:4, 5 *cb*), a person, by honestly examining himself, may know whether or not he is among God's people." [Boettner, p.310-311]
  2. Or can He? "Man's heart is deceitful above all things, and exceeding corrupt. Who can know it (Jer.17:19). This is true especially regarding the analysis of one's own life. For that reason, such an analysis can never lead to certainty... That is linked up with the fact that man's works can never be the foundation of certainty." [Berkouwer, p.293]

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\* *Authors of works identified by an asterisk are Calvinists.*