

Lesson 6 –An Overview of Calvinism
A Study of Religions Beliefs
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Introduction: Calvinism is a system of belief that has influenced most religious bodies.

- A. John Calvin (1509-1564) was a key figure in the Reformation.
 - 1. His followers developed into what we now know as the Presbyterian church.
 - 2. Calvin's teachings can be summarized into five tenants (often called "Calvin's TULIP"):
 - (1) Total Depravity; (2) Unconditional Election; (3) Limited Atonement; (4) Irresistible Grace; and (5) Perseverance of the Saints.
- B. As with all systems of men, there is a wrong approach towards the scriptures.
 - 1. Bible study is minimized by the false view of the Holy Spirit. Men often will attribute their false views of scripture to the Holy Spirit. He has it and you do not! So he does not have to prove anything.
 - 2. Systems of men will follow the approach of wresting difficult passages first and then wresting the easy to understand passages. **(2 Pt 3:15-17)**
 - 3. The contradictions of this system are many. Still many out of loyalty to men continue in these beliefs. **(Gal 1:10)**

I. The Calvinistic View of God

- A. There are several false views that they base on the sovereignty of God.
 - 1. To say God is sovereign is to say that He "exercises supreme, permanent authority." The scriptures bear this out. **(Rom 9:5; Mt 28:18)**
 - 2. God is all knowing. **(Rom 11:33)**
 - 3. With these two correct Bible points in view the Calvinist claims that God has predestined everything.
- B. Foreknowledge does not mean predestination. **(Rom 4:17)**
 - 1. While God has a knowledge of things before they happen, this does not mean he approves of them. **(Heb 1:8; Jas 1:13-17)**
 - 2. God may choose not to know some things. **(Jer 32:35)**
- C. The Calvinistic view of God changes His Character
 - 1. Can a God who never gave a man a chance send him to hell? Can God send a baby to hell? The God of the Calvinists can. Not the God of the Bible. **(Deut 32:4)**
 - 2. It is possible to preach another Jesus. **(2 Cor 11:3-4)**

II. The five points of Calvinism

- A. **Total depravity.**
 - 1. Calvin taught that we all have inherited sin from Adam and are therefore sinful in nature from birth so that we are completely inclined to do evil.
 - 2. One cannot do good even if he wants to because of his depraved nature which he inherited from Adam.
 - 3. Consider some common proof texts. **(Rom 5:12; Psalms 51:5)**
 - a. How did sin spread? Was it inherited or did they commit sin?
 - b. How does the Bible define sin? **(1 Jn 3:4)**
 - c. Was David born a sinner or into a sinful world?
 - 4. How does this harmonize with other passages? **(Ezekiel 18:19-20)**
 - 5. Consider these questions:
 - (1) If man is totally depraved, how is it possible for him to get worse? **(2 Tim. 3:13)**
 - (2) How is it possible for an infant to be saved? Christ, however, taught that little

children were the kind of people in the kingdom. **(Luke 18:15-16)**

- (3) Can sin really be transmitted from parent to child? We all suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, but not the guilt. **(Rom. 5:12)**. I came from God sinless, but have departed from Him when I sinned. **(Eccl. 7:29; Ezek. 28:15)**.
- (4) Does man have any choice in the matter? The Scriptures teach that we can choose whether we want to follow the "carnal mind" ruled by Satan, or the "spiritual mind" ruled by God. **(Rom. 8:5-14; Rom. 6:12-13)**

B. Unconditional Election

1. Since man is totally depraved and can't do good if he wants to, then God must step in.
2. So God has determined who is going to be saved and who is not and there is nothing anyone can do about it.
3. Man therefore is saved without any action being expected on his part whatsoever.
4. Consider several objections to this doctrine:
 - (1) This makes God a respecter of persons, unless He saves everyone. But the Bible tells us that this is not so. **(Acts 10:34-35)**.
 - (2) This takes away the free will response of man to the will of God. **(Phil. 2:12; Acts 2:40; Acts 2:38; John 3:16; Mark 16:16; etc.)**
 - (3) If God has already determined who will be saved, why preach the gospel?
 - (4) This would also make the Judgment unnecessary. **(Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:10)**

C. Limited Atonement

1. Since God determines beforehand who will be saved and who will be lost, then it follows that the atonement of Jesus Christ is only for the elect -- those that God has predetermined to be saved.
2. Christ did not die just for the elect. **(Heb. 2:9; John 3:16-21; 1 John 2:2; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:5-6)**.
3. Christ died for all, but all do not accept His atonement.

D. Irresistible Grace

1. It follows that since one is so depraved that one cannot do anything good, the only way that God can save one is to change that person. This is done by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
2. And since God has predetermined who is to be saved and who is not, then those determined to be saved cannot resist God's grace. They will be saved whether they want to be or not.
3. We are told that we can resist God's grace. **(cf. Acts 7:51; Heb. 10:28,29)**.

E. Perseverance Of The Saints

1. Finally it follows that if God has determined beforehand who will be saved or not, the saved certainly will be preserved to the end. If God has determined to save them, they won't be lost no matter what.
2. We are told that we can fall away. **(Heb. 6:4-6)**.
3. We can sin after receiving salvation and face judgment. **(Heb. 10:26-29)**.
4. It is possible for us to return to our former state. **(2 Pet. 2:20-22)**.

III. Helping to free others from Satan's snare

- A. We need great patience to help other caught in this system. **(2 Tim 2:24-26)**
- B. Try to patiently study with your friends. Start with respect for the word of God. **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**
- C. In time they may come to see the love of God and be freed from this enslaving system.

Conclusion: If we do not help those in error, who will?

(Material adapted from Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.)

Calvinism

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

When we talk about Calvinism, we are talking about a theological system formulated by John Calvin. John Calvin (1509-1564) was a key figure in the Reformation. While his followers developed into what we now know as the Presbyterian church, very few Christian denominations have not been influenced by his teachings. Calvin's teachings were by no means completely original. He borrowed much from Augustine, Martin Luther, and others. But he was able to put the teachings of all those before him into a concise theological system. While Calvin's teachings entailed much, they can be summarized into five tenants (often called "Calvin's TULIP"): (1) Total Depravity; (2) Unconditional Election; (3) Limited Atonement; (4) Irresistible Grace; and (5) Perseverance of the Saints. We want to look at each of these closer:

Total Depravity

Calvin taught that we all have inherited sin from Adam and are therefore sinful in nature from birth so that we are completely inclined to do evil. One cannot do good even if he wants to because of his depraved nature which he inherited from Adam. This doctrine, however, raises several questions:

(1) If man is totally depraved, how is it possible for him to get worse? To be totally depraved does not leave man any room to get any worse. Yet the Bible says that it is possible for some men to "grow worse and worse." (2 Tim. 3:13).

(2) How is it possible for an infant to be saved? If a baby is depraved and evil, then there is really no hope for them under this doctrine. Of course some Calvinist get around this by saying that a baby is regenerated at death, even though he has no chance to "accept Christ as Savior" or to be called by God as one of his Elect. Of course, it was this kind of thinking that gave rise to infant baptism. Christ, however, taught that little children were the kind of people in the kingdom ("totally depraved?"). (Luke 18:15-16).

(3) Can sin really be transmitted from parent to child? Now no one will deny that the consequences of a sin might be passed on, but not the guilt. For example, the child of the drunkard may suffer consequences because of his father's sin, but he himself is not guilty unless he too participates in the sin. We all suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, but not the guilt. (Rom. 5:12). We need to realize that the only sin one is held guilty of is his own. I will be punished for my sin, not of my parents or of Adam. (Ezek. 18:20). I came from God sinless, but have departed from Him when I sinned. (Eccl. 7:29; Ezek. 28:15). I sinned when I transgressed God's law, not when Adam transgressed. (1 John 3:4)

(4) Does man have any choice in the matter? The Calvinist says no. According to this doctrine man is engulfed in a "carnal nature" which makes it impossible for him to anything but sin. But the Scriptures do not teach so. The Scriptures teach that we can choose whether we want to follow the "carnal mind" ruled by Satan, or the "spiritual mind" ruled by God. (Rom. 8:5-14; Rom. 6:12-13)

Unconditional Election

From the idea of total depravity springs another idea. Since man is totally depraved and can't do good if he wants to, then God must step in and save him. So God has determined who is going to be saved and who is not and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Since one is depraved God cannot expect one to meet any conditions for election. Man therefore is saved without any action being expected on his part whatsoever. There are several objections that we might offer to this doctrine.

(1) This makes God a respecter of persons, unless He saves everyone. But the Bible tells us that this is not so. That God is "no respecter of persons." (Acts 10:34-35).

(2) This takes away man's part completely in obtaining his salvation. But the Bible teaches that we can obtain salvation by doing what God says. We can effect our own salvation. (Phil. 2:12; Acts 2:40) We are told that there are conditions that one must meet. (Acts 2:38; John 3:16; Mark 16:16; etc.)

(3) If God has already determined who will be saved and who will be lost, why preach the gospel? Everyone will be saved or lost whether I preach to them or not. It has already been determined according to Calvin. But the Bible says to preach as if it makes a difference. (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 8:4)

(4) This would also make the Judgment Day unnecessary. Why have a day of judgment if God has already judged from the foundation of the world. Makes judgment scene of God a mockery. But we are told that we will be judged according to our deeds, not according to what God has already decided before the foundation of the worlds. (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12-13)

Limited Atonement

Since God determines beforehand who will be saved and who will be lost, then it follows that the atonement of Jesus Christ is only for the elect -- those that God has predetermined to be saved. Again, this doctrine is foreign to the Bible. Christ did not die just for the elect. (Heb. 2:9; John 3:16-21; 1 John 2:2; Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:5-6). Christ died for all, but all do not accept His atonement. The only reason any person is not saved is because he chooses not to be. God doesn't determine whether or not I will be saved. I do by either accepting or rejecting His message.

Irresistible Grace

It follows that since one is so depraved that one cannot do anything good, the only way that God can save one is to change that person. The Calvinist would say that He does this by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. And since God has predetermined who is to be saved and who is not, then those determined to be saved cannot resist God's grace. They will be saved whether they want to be or not. (Of course, no one can really want to be saved, since he is totally depraved.) But, the Bible teaches otherwise.

We are told that we can resist God's grace. (cf. Acts 7:51; Heb. 10:28,29). We can choose whether or not we will follow God and be saved. (cf. Rom. 6:16). I can read and understand God's word without the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 3:2-4; Rom. 10:13-14,16-17) -- And obey it.

Perseverance Of The Saints

Finally it follows that if God has determined beforehand who will be saved or not, then those He saved certainly will be preserved to the end. If God has determined to save them, they won't be lost no matter what. The Bible, however, does not teach "once saved, always saved." We are told that we can fall away. (Heb. 6:4-6). We can sin after receiving salvation and face the consequence of judgment. (Heb. 10:26-29). It is possible for us to return to our former state.(2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Conclusion

While many are not willing to accept all the teachings of Calvin, they are none the less affected by these doctrines. Naturally, since it has been many years since Calvin formulated his doctrines, those who follow them have modified them somewhat. Today, these doctrines may take on a different form, but what is taught is only a slight departure from classical Calvinism.

What is often taught today is: (1) Man is a sinner because he inherited his sin from Adam. (2) The only way man can turn to God is by asking God to enter his life and change him by the operation of the Holy Spirit so that he can understand God's word. (3) Man, then believing in God and accepting Christ as "personal Savior" can now be changed from a "depraved" individual, to a "spirit-filled", godly individual. and (4) Once this occurs, man is saved and can never be lost. Really, the only departure from classical Calvinism that we see today is the introduction of free choice.

How foreign to the Bible can the doctrines of Calvinism be? Let's follow God's word.