

# Calvinism

We often hear people refer to the “five points of Calvinism.” These “Five Points”, as they are commonly called, are simply the fundamental tenets of a theological system often attributed to the French reformer John Calvin (1509-1564 A.D.). Calvin was not the first to teach this doctrine (Augustine held similar views in the fourth century), but his influence did much to give it wide acceptance among Protestant groups.

As an aid to memory, the five points are popularly expressed in the following “TULIP” acrostic:

- T**otal Depravity
- U**nconditional Election
- L**imited Atonement
- I**rresistible Grace
- P**erseverance of the Saints

Although these five doctrines are accepted and taught by most Protestant denominations (sometimes only in part), they contain much that is at variance with the New Testament’s teaching about God’s scheme of redemption.

## Total Depravity

Calvinism teaches that all human beings are born in sin, totally depraved, having inherited this fallen nature from Adam. The basic fallacy of this erroneous doctrine is the failure to recognize that sin is not something one inherits, but rather what one personally commits when he transgresses God’s will. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” (1Jn 3:4)

It is not the sins of our parents, grandparents, or anyone else, back to and including Adam, that render us spiritually dead. It is our own sins. This could not be more clearly and emphatically stated than it is by the prophet Ezekiel: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” (18:20)

Ephesians 2:3 mentions being “by nature” children of wrath. However, notice verses 1 and 2: “you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked.” Does it sound like Paul is describing a sinful nature that was inherited, or a condition that was the result of the life of sin these people had formerly engaged in themselves?

## Unconditional Election

Calvinism teaches that as an exercise of His sovereign will, God has from eternity chosen and predestined every individual person who will be saved. Furthermore, this “election”, we are told, is irrespective of anything done by that individual which might be construed as a condition of his salvation. Obviously this doctrine also necessarily implies that all who are not among the “elect” are unconditionally predestined by God to be among the “reprobate”, and they can do nothing to avoid this condemnation.

This flies in the face of what the Bible tells us repeatedly about the nature of God. In Acts 10:34-35 the apostle Peter states: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

God is certainly sovereign over His creation, and we have no right to question anything He might choose to do. However when He tells us that he does not show partiality we may rest assured that this is true!

Any language in scripture which speaks of God’s having predestined or chosen certain things must not be pressed into meaning that this involves individuals (what the theologians call “particular election”) or that it is completely divorced from man’s response to God’s salvation proffered in Christ.

## Limited Atonement

This false doctrine demonstrates how one error leads to another. Since Calvinism teaches that God has unconditionally predestined every individual who will be saved (without regard to anything they might do), it logically follows that Christ only died for those “elect” - His atonement was limited in its scope and intent. That this is contrary to the

scriptures may be seen by merely examining the following passages:

- Heb 2:9 Jesus tasted death for every man
- 1Tim 2:6 Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all
- 1Jn 2:2 Jesus is the atonement for the sins of the whole world
- Titus 2:11 the grace of God brings salvation to all men
- 2Pet 3:9 The Lord does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance
- 1Tim 2:4 God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth
- Rev 22:11 whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely

The Bible certainly does not teach that all will be saved, but that is God's desire, and by His grace He has made salvation available to all who will receive it in Christ.

### **Irresistible Grace**

As pointed out earlier, Calvinism teaches that:

- man is born totally unable to do anything spiritually good
- God has unconditionally elected certain ones to be saved

"Irresistible grace" affirms that the Holy Spirit acts upon the heart of those who have been elected in such a way that its operation may not be resisted - it must and will succeed. This doctrine stems from what is probably the most fundamental error of the whole Calvinistic system - the denial of the free will of man. The reprobate is seen as unable to come to God if he would; the elect as unable to refuse to do so.

And yet, to those Jews who contradicted their preaching, Paul and Barnabas were heard to say: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it . . . we are turning to the Gentiles." Acts 13 :46 To those who rejected his message, Stephen said, "You men who

are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit." Acts 7:51

The purpose of preaching the gospel to every creature is to give opportunity for all to surrender their will to the will of God.

We should rejoice to know that "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." Jn 1: 12

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

This is the doctrine that says a Christian can never so sin as to be lost, or that he cannot "fall from grace." Interestingly, there is one passage in the New Testament where these very words are found, in a warning against that very possibility:

"You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4)

There are many other, equally emphatic, warnings in the New Testament to God's people of the danger of departing from the faith:

"Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God." (Heb 3:12)

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." (2Pet 3:17)

It is assuring to know that we are "kept by the power of God" (1Pet 1:5), and that no external force can separate us from His love (Rom 8:38-39), but that in no way implies that we can live any way we please and still go to heaven when we die.

After reminding us of how God dealt with His people in the Old Testament when they disobeyed Him, Paul gives us this warning: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1Cor 10:12)