



## ADVANCED BIBLE STUDIES

### 15. What About Calvinism?

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**What About Calvinism?** **WARNING:** This article is not for the faint of heart but for good and honest seekers of Truth. Some who read this article may be angered, others will be surprised by what they read. We are not trying to be offensive, but sometimes the Truth offends. See Matthew 15:12-14 cf. Galatians 4:16. It is our only purpose to speak the Truth in love. See Ephesians 4:15. Above all else we want you to know that God loves you deeply and that he has provided the only way to eternal life through Jesus Christ his Son and through his Holy Spirit. This is what the gospel of the kingdom is all about! But, there are many false teachers and doctrinal errors that we must guard against as we prove all things and hold to the good. See I Thessalonians 5:21 and I John 4:1. Dear friend, you must not take our word or any man's word (especially the creeds of men) for Truth. Take God's Word as the only Truth and make sure that you see (i.e., believe) it for yourself. Don't take our word for anything, take God's Word for everything! If you have any questions, please feel free to write us. Now, please give humble and prayerful consideration to what you are about to read. To God alone be the glory!

The doctrine that is commonly known as "Calvinism" did not in fact originate with the French theologian and reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564), but with Augustine (396-430), a Roman Catholic philosopher and bishop of the fifth century. It was, however, John Calvin (and others) who would crystallize the teaching of Augustine into what has come to be known as the "Five Points of Calvinism." The five points of Calvinism became formalized in the "Westminster Confession of Faith" (1647), a creed of Protestant Denominationalism, which has had a profound impact on the modern religious world, especially in the Reformed Churches. It should be realized that Augustinian-Calvinism is, in one form or another, the basis for the vast majority of Catholic and Protestant theology and faith. It also needs to be stated as clearly as possible that perhaps no doctrine or system of theology is more damnable than the heresy of Augustinian-Calvinism. It needs to be clearly understood at the beginning of this study that the heart of the problem of Calvinism lies not merely in the Five Points of Calvinism, but especially in Calvinism's misunderstanding and perversion of the nature of God and man. With this said, let's look at the Five Points of Calvinism commonly referred to as "TULIP":

### The Five Points Of Calvinism Briefly Presented

**T = TOTAL HEREDITY DEPRAVITY:** Man – in his unsaved state – is completely incapable of pleasing God, because of his sinful nature. He cannot seek God or know him because he is spiritually dead. Thus he is unable to please God. He is totally sinful in every way. This is not to say that he is as bad or evil as he could be, but that there is no true goodness in him.

This is the beginning point of Calvinistic error. This doctrine teaches that all men since Adam's fall are totally born in sin and possess a sinful and absolutely depraved nature (inherited from Adam) incapable of anything good. Thus, man is totally unable to respond to God in any way or do anything to save himself ... therefore God alone must take the initiative in salvation from beginning to end.

**U = UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION:** Because of the dead, depraved nature of man, it is God – not man – who must do all the work of salvation, through the work of the Godhead. The Father chose those whom he wills to be saved from before the creation of the world apart from anything they could or would do. The Son secured their salvation by paying the debt for their sin on the Cross. The Holy Spirit then awakens the spirit of the elect to recognize their sinfulness and desire forgiveness. All this is so that they can then repent and express faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Because man has no free will and cannot respond to God in his depraved state, God must be the one to freely act. This God did in eternity when he chose to predestine certain individuals to salvation and certain individuals he ordained to damnation. This doctrine teaches the absolute and complete sovereignty of God in unconditionally electing men to salvation or to damnation apart from their will. This doctrine also calls into questions the possibility of any freedom of human will.

**L = LIMITED ATONEMENT:** Both the recipients and the scope of Christ's sacrifice and atonement on the cross were actually limited by God himself. In other words, Christ's death on the cross secured total and absolute forgiveness of sins – past, present, and future – but only for those whom God had predestined (elected) before the foundation of the world. To be very clear, however; the reach of the atonement was limited not by Christ's ability to provide forgiveness, but by God's willingness and desire to show the glory of his mercy only to his elect – those whom he predestined before the creation of the world.

Since only the elect will be saved the benefits of the atonement are limited to the elect and the elect alone. To put it simply, Christ did not die for all men but only for those persons individually predestined to salvation. What is more, God does not really love or desire to save all men. In fact he actually loves to damn some souls to hell.

"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 willing by his grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing 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 I & II).

What all of this means is that man cannot respond to the Word of the Gospel until the Holy Spirit works on the heart of the elected sinner in a manner that is totally separate and apart from the Word of God. In fact, according to most Calvinists, the sinner cannot even believe until God the Holy Spirit performs his inner work of illumination and gives that individual faith. When God works within the heart of the individual such an operation is irresistible. Those elected to be saved, cannot and could not resist the call of God even if they wanted to. Those elected to damnation will not be called by God's Spirit and cannot and could not be saved even if they wanted to. So, in the conviction and conversion of sinners God must change the depraved nature of that sinner into one of a saint. This then, is the "miracle of conversion" to a Calvinist, and this miracle is performed by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the individual who is predestined to be saved.

**P = PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS:** Because God has chosen the elect; because the Son died for their sin; and finally because the Spirit awakened them to everlasting life, God in his sovereignty and faithfulness alone initiates and secures the salvation of the elect. This eternal security is not based upon the continuing faithfulness or ability of man to persevere or accomplish his own salvation, but rather on the faithfulness of God to preserve and secure salvation for the elect no matter what the elect does. Once an individual is so saved they cannot fall from grace and be lost.

The final tenet of Calvinism is the doctrine of "eternal security of believers." Once God has so miraculously saved the elect, their salvation depends totally upon God's continuing work within them and nothing they do can or will effect their salvation. Thus because salvation, according to this system, is completely and entirely a matter of grace, it is impossible for one so saved to ever be lost. Again, it needs to be noted that this system of faith is so tightly constructed that if one point is in error all of the points are in error ... if one tenet is wrong, all are wrong!

Well, did you get all of that? No? The truth of the matter is most followers of Calvinism do not really know or understand the system they supposedly subscribe to. Most do not realize that the Five Points of Calvinism are actually a part of the man-made creeds that serve as the basis for many Protestant denominations, especially those in the Reformed Churches. And tragically, many do not realize that Calvinism is not actually taught in Scripture. Rather, it is one of the most complicated and intricately constructed doctrines in all of the long history of the Apostasy. (Perhaps it should be mentioned right here that there are many who just cannot accept – rightfully so – the harsher views of Calvinism, but who still accept one or two points of Calvinism as well as other Reformation views. Thus there are "hard" Calvinists and "soft" Calvinists. For those who are nominally Calvinistic may I encourage you to consider that logically all Five Points of Calvinism stand or fall together. Each point is dependent on the one that precedes it. Each point gives rise to the one that follows. All need to be judged by the Word of God.) Again, I would encourage you to follow Christ not Calvinism. But, there is more ...

## Point And Counterpoint

The heart of the heresy of Calvinism is actually not in any of the individual Five Points of Calvinism. (Though each point is certainly a gross perversion of the Truth of the gospel!) The heart of the heresy of Calvinism is actually found in the misunderstanding of the Nature of God and specifically a horrible misunderstanding and perversion of the Sovereignty of God and the Free Will of Man.

**BE VERY CLEAR ON THIS:** Calvinism's God is not the God of the Bible! Calvinism's God is a monster who purposely and deliberately decrees damnation to men who have no free will or choice in the matter. They are simply predestined to hell. Calvinism's God loves only the elect who apart from their will were chosen to salvation. Calvinism's view of man is that man has absolutely no free will or choice in either salvation or damnation. If Calvinism's view of God is correct than nothing really matters! Why? Because if you are predestined to damnation, there is nothing you can do about it. (Even if you wanted to be saved, you couldn't.) And, if you are predestined to salvation, there is nothing you can do about it. (Even if you wanted to be lost, you couldn't.) So God is little more than an evil tyrant who plays games with us and we are but pawns in the hand of a most despicable God. Thus we have no choice, no free will and no real individual responsibility because God is going to damn or save us irrespective of what we do. What a horrible and blasphemous view of God Calvinism has given us! Calvinism believes that if God is sovereign then we can have no free will ... if we have any free will and choice then God is not sovereign. Tragically, most who embrace the various points of Calvinism have absolutely no idea what those tenets of Calvinism really mean or where they actually came from or upon what they are actually based. (If you do not believe that this is the essence of Calvinism, then you need to study Calvinism for yourself and see what John Calvin and many of his followers really teach! But, it would be far better for you to simply reject Calvin and the Reformed Creeds and accept Christ and his Word.)

In understanding the nature of God no other subject is as vitally important as that of divine sovereignty. Simply put, God is either Lord of all or he is not Lord at all! But, to embrace the doctrine of divine sovereignty is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of faith. What, after all, does it mean for God to be sovereign? Beyond this if God is sovereign what about man? What about free will? It is to the subject of divine sovereignty and human free will that we now turn our attention. This is one of those Bible subjects that we need to approach with great "fear and trembling" (i.e., humility). Perhaps the words of the apostle Paul are in order:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"  
"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"  
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory  
forever!

Amen.

(Romans 11:33-36)

## The Sovereignty Of God

The sovereignty of God grows out of his very nature. Because God is Lord of All and because he is the Infinite One, he is sovereign. The term sovereignty basically means that God rules! In fact sovereignty is usually understood in terms of the absolute lordship of God. That Scripture everywhere affirms the sovereignty of God is impossible to deny.

Psalm 103:19 cf. Psalm 115:3; 145:13 etc. – "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his sovereignty (i.e., kingdom) rules over all." See II Chronicles 29:11-13.

In Ephesians 1:15-23 we find that the sovereignty of God is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ. See I Timothy 6:15-16 and Revelation 19:16 ... Acts 10:36; Romans 9:5.

However, any attempt to fully explain divine sovereignty especially in light of human will and responsibility will be met with incredible frustration simply because we are not God. Consider Isaiah 55:1-13. It should be noted that because God is Lord he will do whatever he wants. See Isaiah 55:11 (Isaiah 46:10) ... Psalm 115:3; 135:6 ... Daniel 4:35. (Reconsider Job 32:1-37:24; 38:1-42:17!). Do not miss this point:

*God can do whatever he wants and whatever he does is right!*

So, we must acknowledge and accept the Lord and his will in simple trusting faith whether we understand his will or not. (Whether we like it or not.) The bottom line is this: God is Lord and we are not! So, we need to let God be God. Whenever we consider the subject of sovereignty there are several subjects that must sooner or later enter into the discussion:

- Free Will and Individual Responsibility

- Divine Predestination and Election

One of the biggest dangers we face in seeking to understand sovereignty in light of all other Bible subjects is that we too often end up pitting them one against the other. Simply put we look at it as an "either-or" situation. (Either God is sovereign or I have free will. If I have free will, God can't be sovereign. If God is sovereign, I can't have free will.) Then we usually just throw up our hands and accept one position to the exclusion of the other. The fact is we don't like holding two "apparently contradictory" ideas in mind. So while we do everything we can to explain them, if we are not careful, we only end up explaining them away. How then are we to deal with the dilemma of sovereignty especially since it affects nearly every other doctrine of Scripture? In a word – faith! See II Corinthians 5:7. As we approach the issues of sovereignty we must humbly realize that all we are able to do is move toward a solution to the "problem" of sovereignty. (We should probably be very suspicious of any "systematic theology" that attempts to – or believes it can – fully explain either the nature of God or his sovereignty.) However, let us give serious consideration to each of the major issues:

### Free Will and Individual Responsibility

Does man have free will? This is one of the hottest ongoing debates in faith and religion! Calvinism ultimately says that man simply does not have free will and choice in matters of salvation. Setting aside the subject of sovereignty for just one moment (as if that can be done!) consider what the Sovereign Lord in his Word has said on the subject of man's free will and human responsibility. Scripture everywhere assumes and presumes that we have free will and choice in individual responsibility. Calvinism everywhere assumes and presumes that we do not. Scripture everywhere assumes and presumes that God loves everyone. Calvinism everywhere assumes and presumes that God loves only the elect. What kind of God is that? What kind of love is that? Who will you believe - Calvin or Christ? Consider the following concepts as they relate to sovereignty and free will:

*"Whosoever" and "Everyone"*

Matthew 10:32-33 (Luke 12:8 ... I John 2:23); Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 12:50 (Mark 3:35); Matthew 10:39 (Matthew 16:25; 23:12; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33); Matthew 18:4-5; etc.

John 3:15,16,18,21,36; John 5:24; John 6:35-40,44-50,53-58; John 7:38; John 10:9; John 11:26; John 14:21; I John 4:16; II John 1:9; etc. Acts 2:21 and Revelation 22:17; etc.

Matthew 7:7-8 (Luke 11:9-10); Matthew 7:21,24,26; Mark 7:14; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:39; Romans 1:16; Romans 2:6-16; Romans 10:4; Romans 10:13; Hebrews 2:9; II Peter 3:9; I John 5:1; etc.

*"The World of All Men"*

Jesus died for all men to draw all men to himself that all men might be saved – John 3:16 and John 12:32 (John 1:9) ... Romans 5:18

All men are sinners and bound over to disobedience that God may have mercy on all – Romans 3:23 and Romans 11:32.

See John 1:29; John 3:16; John 6:33,51; John 12:47; John 17:5-25; II Corinthians 5:17-21; I Timothy 1:15; I John 2:2; 4:14; etc.)

- "All we like sheep ... laid on him the iniquity of us all" – Isaiah 53:6
- "God so loved the world ... that whoever ..." – John 3:16
- "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." – Acts 10:34-35
- "God commands all men everywhere to repent." – Acts 17:30
- "God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth... who gave himself a ransom for all." – I Timothy 2:4,6
- "Jesus is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" – I Timothy 4:10
- "Jesus gave himself a ransom for all men" – Titus 2:6
- "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" – Titus 2:11
- "The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." – II Peter 3:9

Perhaps nothing puts all of this into perspective as clearly as Matthew 23:37 – "I would ... but you were not willing"! Consider Luke 7:30 – "The Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected the purpose of God for themselves." And see John 5:40 – "You refuse to come to me to have life." It is absolutely incredible to realize that we can will to refuse and reject the sovereign God who wills to save us. Incredible! The real question is what are you doing with your will and the will of God?

### Predestination And Election

No passages in all the Word sound the depths of the subject of predestination like Romans 8:29-30 and Ephesians 1:3-14 (Philippians 2:12-13 and II Thessalonians 2:13-14; II Peter 1:3-11 cf. I Peter 1:2.). Take the time to study through these Scriptures and think about their awesome truths! Be wary of any doctrinal system that attempts to prove some form of "absolute" form of predestination that ends up denying the freedom of will and choice that God has clearly given us.

While predestination and election is certainly a very complex doctrine, there are some "simpler" passages that just might help us to see things a little more clearly. And as we seek to move toward a better understanding these passages they (along with all the others) should serve to warn us about taking one extreme or another on the matter of divine sovereignty and human free will. There are five examples in Scripture that must be considered when it comes to the doctrine of predestination and foreordination:

- The Fall – Genesis 3 (Romans 5)
- The Flood – Genesis 6
- The City of Nineveh – Jonah 3
- Hezekiah's Death – II Kings 20
- David at Keilah – II Samuel 23

Some very interesting questions are raised when it comes to predestination and foreordination: Did God decree the Fall? Did Adam and Eve have a choice? Do we? Why did God "repent" that he had made man? What does that mean? God said Nineveh was going to be destroyed, Hezekiah was going to die, and David would be captured. But, none of that happened! Why? These and a thousand other questions can certainly be asked from these and other recorded events in the Bible that shed light on the mysteries of God and his sovereignty. *It should be more than obvious that any rigid doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God which does not take into account the free will of men and the possibilities of conditions and contingencies is seriously flawed!* This is one of the most basic problems with Calvinism: Calvinism believes that salvation is totally unconditional and that there are (and can be) no commands that we are given that we must obey in order to be saved. Calvinism believes that if we have to "do" anything, then such would constitute a "work" and that since we are saved by "faith only" we cannot be saved by doing even what God has given us to do in order to be saved. Calvinism cannot seem to reconcile Romans 4 and James 2. Why can't we just accept the truth of both passages? We are justified by both "faith" and "works" just

like Abraham was! When properly understood neither "faith" nor "works" (i.e., the works of God, not the works of the Law and legalistic law-keeping) are antithetical to each other. When properly understood, neither divine sovereignty nor human free will and responsibility are contrary to one another. (For more on this see "What About 'Faith Only?'" )

One of the best places to go to grapple with God's nature and our nature is "The Potter's House" of Jeremiah 18:1-19:15 (cf. Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; 64:8). All of this serves as the background for Paul in Romans 9:1-11:36 (Romans 9:21)! Within these passages we are presented with the full sovereignty and power of God. (It should be wonderfully noted that in the midst of Paul's dealing with the subject of God's sovereignty he also deals with another difficult and challenging subject – the problem of evil. See Romans 1:1-8:39. Also, he does not just deal with the problem of evil he presents its solution as being realized only in Christ!) Yet, we must not forget that the truth is, we will never be able to fully figure out all of this! See Romans 11:33-36. Rather, we will humbly have to learn to live by faith. See II Corinthians 5:7. Perhaps the real question is this, "Can you live by faith and simply accept the fact that you may never fully understand some Bible truths?"

When it comes to the nature of God and especially his sovereignty, if we are not careful, the more we try to explain it the more we end up explaining it away. Sooner or later we must simply fall back on simple trusting faith and exclaim with David, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain." (Psalm 139:6) Ultimately, no matter what we or anyone else thinks or says, "let God be true and every man a liar." (Romans 3:4) *It should be noted in all of this that a God who can be sovereign and yet create man with free will is even more awesome than a God who cannot!* Thus, the God of the Bible is so much greater and far more lovingly wonderful than the "god" (i.e., idol) of Calvinism. It should also go without saying, but it must be said, that if we in any way reject the sovereignty of God then God becomes virtually worthless. If we in any way reject the freedom and responsibility of man then man becomes useless. In fact if we have no free will then God becomes the ultimate monster! What kind of God do you believe in? How big is your God? Maybe your God is too small.

**ONE MORE TIME:** As has been stressed before, only when we have a correct understanding of both the nature of God and man can we approach any other Bible subject. In other words, if we start out wrong when it comes to understanding the nature of God and man, we will certainly end badly. What is more, the doctrine of Calvinism's real error is found in a total misunderstanding of the nature of God which ends up turning God into an evil tyrant, not the loving God you read about in the Bible! (As much as Calvinists protest to the contrary, they cannot deny the fact that the greatest evidence for the abject failure of Calvinism is ... the life of John Calvin himself! Everyone who fancies himself or herself a Calvinist needs to know what John Calvin did with Calvinism in Geneva. [Read history!] But, as for the rest of us, all we really need to know is Christ and him crucified. See I Corinthians 2:2.) It must also be stressed that attempting to deal with the Five Points of Calvinism without understanding their basis in the Sovereignty of God and the Free Will of Man is an exercise in both frustration and futility. With all of this understood, please consider the following brief refutation of the Five Points of Calvinism.

## The Five Points Of Calvinism Biblically And Briefly Refuted

**TOTAL HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY:** The following Scripture refutes this false doctrine: Genesis 1:27,31; Ecclesiastes 7:29; 12:7; Acts 17:28-29; Hebrews 12:9; Ezekiel 18:1-32; Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:14; I John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1-2; James 1:13-15; I Corinthians 14:20; II Timothy 3:13; Romans 3:12; Psalms 58:3; etc. (Study Romans 5:12-17)

**UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION:** The following Scripture refutes this false doctrine: Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:6,11; I Peter 1:17; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; etc. (Study Ephesians 1:3-14 cf. Romans 8:28-30 and I Thessalonians 1:4; I Peter 1:2 with II Thessalonians 2:13-14)

**LIMITED ATONEMENT:** The following Scripture refutes this false doctrine: Isaiah 53:2-6,12; John 3:16; I Corinthians 5:7; I John 2:1-2; 4:14; 5:19; Matthew 20:28; I Timothy 2:3-7; II Peter 3:9; II Corinthians 5:14; John 12:32-33; Hebrews 2:9; Titus 2:11-14; etc. (Study John 10:1-18)

**IRRESISTIBLE GRACE:** The following Scripture refutes this false doctrine: Luke 7:30 and Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34. (Study Ephesians 2:1-10 cf. Colossians 2:13; 3:3,7; Romans 6:2,16-18; I Peter 2:24; I John 1:8-10; Romans 8:12-13)

**PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS:** The following Scripture refutes this false doctrine: Luke 12:42-43; John 15:1-6; Romans 8:12-13; 11:22; 14:15; I Corinthians 6:9-10; 8:11; 9:24-10:12; Galatians 5:1-4; Hebrews 3:12-14; 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26-29; II Peter 2:20-22; etc. (Study II Peter 1:2-11 and John 10:27-29)

## Summary And Conclusion

The doctrines of Augustine and Calvin are among the most destructive and blasphemous heresies of all false doctrines in the religious world. No system of error has permeated the religious world more completely than these dogmas. No system of evil has as far reaching consequences as does this heresy. Augustine and Calvin have turned the Nature of God and Man into a blasphemous and warped system that is the "highest" tribute to the "lowest" doctrines of demons. Perhaps no one captured the spirit of Calvin better than did Will Durant in his encyclopedic "Story of Civilization." In his closing remarks in the chapter on John Calvin, Durant stated:

"... even error lives because it serves some vital need. But we shall always find it hard to love the man who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense." ("The Reformation"; Volume VI; p. 490)

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