



5 Points of Calvinism

Adapted from a seminar I taught at RUF Summer Conference, 2011-2015

“Calvinism is back... John Calvin's 16th century reply to medieval Catholicism's buy-your-way-out-of-purgatory excesses is Evangelicalism's latest success story, complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity, sinful and puny humanity, and the combination's logical consequence, predestination: the belief that before time's dawn, God decided whom he would save (or not), unaffected by any subsequent human action or decision”. –TIME Magazine's 10 Ideas that are Changing the World Right Now, #3 The New Calvinism, 2009

(just for cleaning this up...3 sections to this article- intro, 5 points, common questions...and can we reformat it to get rid of the (type text) at the top of each page? Not sure what that is?)

Introduction

Jeremiah 9:24, “understand and know God”

The goal of this article is clearly that you would understand more about God (this is a thinking article), but pray now and often that understanding leads us to want to “know” God more personally and intimately.

Why are you reading this?

- 1- Some of you don't know what the 5 pts of Calvinism are! That was my story- never taught theology as a child.
- 2- Some of you know/have been taught this- but you find it difficult to communicate them to people.
- 3- Some of you know and are looking for more ammunition to defeat the other side and you will be sorely disappointed.
- 4- Some of you are not sure you believe in Jesus because you see what debate about these things can do to people.

What is Calvinism?

Reformed theology and Calvinism can be used interchangeably.

If you ask people what these words mean- they typically say predestination, election, and TULIP. So much more though.

“Our fascination with election, predestination, and TULIP are but an ornate foyer in the mansion of Reformed Theology and some of us are so fascinated with this room we have never ventured into other rooms.” –James K.A. Smith

Calvinism is bigger than a doctrine of salvation.

Wide-angle lens to see that Calvinism is a life system, a guy named Abraham Kuyper was the Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905), also a Calvinist termed this phrase- life system.

“The object of the word of redemption is not limited to the salvation of individual sinners but extends to the redemption of the world, the renewal and restoration of the entire creation.” –Kuyper

Review of Reformed Theology

Wide angle Calvinism/Reformed Theology says that all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus, and he is reconciling to himself all things.

--The sovereignty of God (the bigness of God in all things- does Christianity exist for the sake of man or the sake of God? God and His glory! Hallowed by Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...tell them “I AM” sent you...God never had a beginning, (therefore He is not “in the dock”) God simply IS.

In Him we live and have our being (Acts 17), From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things (Rom. 11)).

“Christianity then is no longer a message of how to behave but bringing God's redemption to all areas of our lives!” –Billy Dempsey

--This is my Father's world- High view of creation(God doesn't make junk, and he doesn't junk what he's made)

--Justification by faith- this is how men like Luther and Calvin became Christians!

--Priesthood of all believers- does man need a mediator between him and God? YES. But it cannot be a fellow man!

-Re-creational view of the New Heavens/New Earth- the effects of the Fall are much worse than we think...and yet God is undoing their effects! Not just "getting to heaven" but seeing heaven come to earth.

So, the "5 Points" is a small part of Calvinism, a life system that says Christ is Lord over every square inch of His creation. 5 pts is soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), which is a hook for most people into Reformed theology, but the wider aspects of Reformed Theology/Calvinism will sustain us for a life Coram Deo (before the face of God).

What are some of the connotations of Calvinism?

"There is scarcely another word that arouses more suspicion, mistrust, and even animosity among professing Christians as the word Calvinism...yet much of the zeal that is leveled against this system and those who hold and preach it is most certainly a zeal which is not according to knowledge." -W.J. Seaton

Bad: Control, answers, no mystery, no need for evangelism, no need for prayer, no joy, FROZEN CHOSEN, all logic, scared of emotions, arrogant, argumentative, puts God in a box...

If 1 person calls you a name ignore them, if some people call you a name you should think about it, if everyone calls you a name it's probably true!

WSC #1- purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever! John Piper- glorify God by enjoying Him forever! J.K. Smith- glorify God BY enjoying God's creation!

"We are talking about God; so why are you surprised if you cannot grasp it? I mean, if you can grasp it, it isn't God. Let us rather make a devout confession of ignorance, instead of a brash profession of knowledge." -St. Augustine

Good: System that you can always count on, takes the Bible seriously, warm blanket to the soul, embraces mystery, the reason for evangelism, the motivation to pray, joy unspeakable, comfort...

What is our goal?

I hope to help you begin to wrestle through some of these ideas in light of Scripture. Not to indoctrinate you to believe in the 5 Pts. Not an exhaustive explanation or defense. Not a chance to argue. Not to answer every one of your questions. I want these ideas to be beautiful to you as they are to me. BUT I am much more concerned that you leave this article more in love with Jesus than Calvinism.

The label Christian is much more important than the label Calvinist.

I am ok if you disagree with me. You don't have to agree with me! We need to learn how to disagree and be friends.

I believe the 5 Pts. are simply part of our journey through the heights and depths of looking into the death and resurrection of Christ. But we never leave that simple point, never. We never stray from the elementary teaching of the fact that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead, and one day will return. All else is simply going further up and further in.

Historical Overview

-Oct. 31, 1517- Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, nails his 95 Thesis to the door at the church in Wittenberg, Germany as a protest, calling for reform in the theology and practice of the church. This sparked a movement within the Catholic Church calling for these reforms which ultimately led to new branches of the Church. Lutheran, Anglican (Church of England), Episcopal, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Methodist, etc...all have some roots in Calvinistic protestant Reformation.

-1610, Reformed theology was prominent in Holland. James Arminius, a Dutch Professor has just died and his teaching has been formulated into five main points of doctrine by his followers- known as the Arminians.

-Most of the churches in Holland at that time, and most Protestant churches in Europe for that matter, subscribed to the Belgic and Heidelberg Confessions of Faith, which were clearly set on Reformation teachings.

-The Arminians wanted to change this position and they presented their five points of doctrine in the form of a protest or Remonstrance to the Dutch Parliament in 1610. Thus, we have the 5 points of Arminianism.

-1618, eight years later, a council was called to meet in Dort, Holland. A group of church leaders from around Europe gathered for 6 months to examine the teachings of Arminius in light of the Scriptures.

-The council or synod concluded that the teachings of Arminius were not in agreement with the testimony of Scripture, and rejected them.

-They felt that a mere rejection was not sufficient, so they set forth to respond to each of the 5 points the Arminians had put forth in protest. Thus, we have the 5 points of Calvinism.

It is ironic that neither John Calvin nor James Arminius had a direct role in producing these five-point summaries of doctrine that bear their names.

John Calvin lived from 1509-1564...5 points of Calvinism were written in 1618 (**maybe write this on board?**)

James Arminius lived from 1560-1609...5 points of Arminianism were written in 1610

--"Calvinism" and "Arminianism" find their origins long before Calvin and Arminius entered the debate.

Saint Augustine and Pelagius debated these same issues in the 5th Century. The Council of Orange (529) condemned Pelagius' views in favor of Augustine's views. *The whole idea of councils and condemning ideas and doctrine sounds so foreign to us. Can you imagine a Council today to accept or reject ideas of faith?*

--One historian called Calvin the 'virtual' founder of America...at the time of the revolution, 85% of Americans were Calvinistic...rule of law, democracy, freedom of religion, work ethic, education, representative government, etc!

--Both groups are Christians. Both groups have crazies you wish would go away. This is an in-house debate. Up to this day, many men and women across a broad range of denominational backgrounds hold to the tradition expressed in the 5 Pts of Calvinism, including: Baptist (you may be surprised that early Baptists were all Calvinists, Charles Spurgeon, John Piper), Methodist (George Whitfield), Presbyterian (RUF, Tim Keller), Anglican (39 Articles), Non-Denominational, Gospel Coalition, Matt Chandler, and many others.

5 Points of Arminianism
• Free Will
• Conditional election
• Universal atonement
• Resistible grace
• Perseverance of some saints

5 Points of Calvinism
• Total Depravity
• Unconditional election
• Limited Atonement
• Irresistible grace
• Perseverance of all saints

Problems with the 5 Pts of Calvinism

While the 5 Pts are a useful summary of salvation, they suffer several critical problems of which everyone must be aware.

1. **Agenda:** The agenda was set by the opposition, but Calvinism is bigger than these five points. John Calvin's own *Institutes of the Christian Religion* covers many important Biblical and theological issues, including: the Church, assurance of salvation, the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Christian life, and the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit.

2. **Tone:** Because the Five Points are a rejection and response to the articles presented by the Remonstrants, they tend to have a negative tone.

3. **Summary:** While dealing with important core issues of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), the Five Points of Calvinism do not adequately address adoption, sanctification, glorification, or union with Christ.

4. **Scope:** Because the Five Points of Calvinism focus solely on soteriology, one could miss that Biblical Calvinism is a unified philosophy encompassing all of life, including art, history, culture, politics, science, and relationships.

(adapted from *Intro to Theological Studies*, Dr. Douglas Kelly)

Where is the love?

Calvinism is merely a clanging cymbal, noise (according to 1 Cor. 13) if it doesn't lead us to a life of love and compassion! Why doesn't anyone accuse us of loving people too much?? Calvinism when used properly is a beautiful system of belief that is extremely helpful!

But if used improperly- it can turn ugly and be used for great harm.

Where is the humility?

When you get a shot at the doctor...for a short time you are more vulnerable for infection. When someone discovers Reformed theology for the first time...they are more vulnerable to the infection of religious pride. This is or will be a problem and it should not be!

There is something about Reformed Theology...you see the water and it is so inviting, you can't help but dive in and then you can't understand why the Christians around you aren't doing the same thing!

You/I need humility. Romans 3:27, says if there is nothing that you did that made God love you and save you...then how can you boast? You can't!

Where is the respect?

I personally would like to see more respect for our brothers/sisters in Christ who believe differently. George Whitefield was a famous Calvinist preacher (1700's) was good friends with John Wesley. When asked if he would see Wesley in heaven, he said *no...Wesley would be so much closer to Christ than himself that he would not be able to see him.* The label Calvinist does not matter- you are a Christian first.

I don't want you to fall in love with Calvinism...I want you to fall in love with Jesus.

The Central Issue

There is a pub in Germany with a saying above the door, Soli Deo Gloria (to God alone be the glory)

At the end of the day, every one of these points should lead us to say...

Jonah 2:9, "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" Salvation is a work of God from beginning to end, and it is to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1) God is the author of and perfecter of our faith.

I just want you to see that God is at the bottom of it all- the reason you are a Christian- is because God did it.

Takeways so far

--I don't want you to fall in love with Calvinism...I want you to fall in love with Jesus. Don't lose sight of the 1st mountain- Jesus lived the life you should have and died the death you should have and rose from the dead and is coming back.

--There needs to be love and compassion, respect and humility

--5points of Calvinism is a small part of the whole of Reformed Theology (like baking a cake...I don't want you to leave loving vanilla...it's a small part of the whole...and by itself it doesn't taste good)

--5 points of Calvinism were written after John Calvin lived and were a response to 5 points.

5 Points of Calvinism

- 1) **(T) Total Depravity**- (depravity is key word, total is where we get confused)

"Without knowledge of self- there is no knowledge of God...and without knowledge of God- there is no knowledge of self." -John Calvin

"We all have an uneasiness...reduced to its simplest terms, a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand."

-William James, Harvard Psychologist

"Man is born free, and everywhere is in chains..." Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his Social Contract

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night..." Charles Wesley, hymn writer

The Bible tells a story:

God created a world out of love with creativity, potential, and beauty...his premiere creation was man/woman...His image bearers...for a time, God hung out with man/woman on the Earth and everything that was created was good.

Somehow- evil entered the picture...

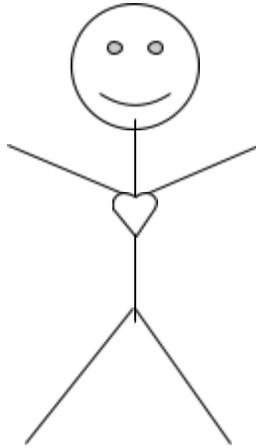
The course of history has been radically altered. Things that were once good were corrupted by evil, Adam and Eve were deceived, they shot God the finger and said we want to be God, and Gen. 2:17...spiritual death entered our world. Now we share the same spiritual DNA as Adam. He is our representative.

Gen 1-2 are significant chapters that tell of a time very different from where we find ourselves today.

Now Because of the fall of Adam, as spiritual ancestors of Adam (Romans 5:12-19), every person is totally depraved.

What was once good...is now corrupted, distorted, and misdirected. We were created to desire God, worship God, rest in God our creator and we are now, all of us, misdirected so that we desire the wrong things, we desire and worship created things instead of the Creator.

Depravity in Bible



We are:

Spiritually blind- 2 Corinthians 4:4

Spiritually deaf- John 10, Romans 11:8

Our hearts are desperately sick- Jeremiah 17:9

Our minds are corrupted- Rom. 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:14, John 10:26, Galatians 5:17

Slaves to sin- John 8:34, Galatians 3:22

We have lost the ability to change ourselves- Jeremiah 13:23, Matthew 7:18, John 6:44, 65, John 15:4-5

Spiritually dead- Romans 5:12, Ephesians 2:1-3, Colossians 2:13

Rebellious/ hostile to God- Romans 8:7-8, Colossians 1:21

Sinful from birth- Psalm 51:5, Psalm 58:3, Genesis 8:21

All of us are this way- 1 Kings 8:46, 1 John 1:10, Romans 3:9-12, Psalm 14:1-3, Ecclesiastes 7:20

Clarification

--This is every person who ever lived after Genesis 3 (but one- Jesus) before they become a Christian.

--Key word is depravity, the word total is confusing, but key word is depravity

--**Depravity** is speaking about our *nature*, not our *behavior*. Our actions are a result of our condition, they don't cause the condition.

--The word **Total** is speaking about *how much* of us is affected, not that we are all as totally bad as we could be, or even that no one in the world who isn't a Christian does anything good (Romans 3).

(People, such as Christopher Hitchens, look at the world and the actions of people who aren't Christians and think...that's a silly doctrine, people do good things all the time! It must not be true).

Good works are like Monopoly \$\$\$- Psalm 143, "no one is righteous before YOU," plenty of people are righteous compared to me!! *When you win at Monopoly you have a lot of \$500's...what if you took that to the bank to cash?*

Total means there is not a part of us, or the world, that is not affected by the Fall of man. The question is how bad is it?

--God did not originally create man this way. Adam was created in the image of God, truly free to sin or not to sin in a way that we, inheritors of a sinful nature, cannot comprehend.

--We still bear the image of God. There will still be good in all people to affirm. But that good does not merit anything with God (Isaiah 64:6). We are like old castles in ruins- Schaeffer

Conclusion

We are so resistant, that apart from a miracle of grace- we would never repent and believe. When it comes to salvation (who is my savior?), in our nature...we always choose wrong. Given 1,000 chances, I would choose to be my own savior 1,000 times. If God doesn't break in...I will remain there.

So what?

---The purpose of talking about depravity is NOT to "put you in your place," it is to explain why you/I are the way we are. You are free to disagree...but you need to come up with an explanation for why things are the way they are.

If all this is true- everything that follows must be grace!

Questions

a) Why would God command/invite me to do something I can't do?

How can I be held responsible for something I can't do?

--The intent of the command is to reveal to me that I can't do it

--God deals with man according to his obligations, not according to his ability

--If the Bible says we can't/won't come to God unless God does something first...and people clearly come...then either we aren't that depraved after all OR God does something (point 2).

--Either man has the ability to overcome his inability and do something by his own power which God says he cannot do by his depraved nature

OR

Man has the ability to meet the responsibility that God commands by God's power as God enables him

b) Is depravity actual or hypothetical?

--If we say no one can believe, and people clearly believe...then either people are not as depraved as we thought or God does something in them to enable them to believe.

c) How bad did the Fall of Adam affect us? We all agree it affects us, but how bad is it?

--Are we spiritually dead or at some point, did God remove the effects of the Fall from all men- bringing them to a neutral position- ready to choose to accept or reject God?

d) This isn't fair. I wasn't there...I don't want to be "in Adam." A) If I had been there, I would have chosen the same thing. B) We don't really want to get rid of the idea of representation because we love to have the 2nd Adam be our representative!

Takeaway: God has to do something! If this is true...then all that happens after must be grace.

2) **(I)- Irresistible Grace** (grace is key word, irresistible is where we get confused)

"Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." -Charles Wesley

"I take it that the highest proof of Christ's power is not that he offers salvation, not that he bids you take it if you will, but that when you reject it, when you hate it, when you despise it, he has a power whereby he can change your mind, make you think differently from your former thoughts, and turn you from the error of your ways." -Charles Spurgeon

John 11- Lazarus- God did something...Lazarus get up...

God does something! God breaks through our resistance, He overcomes our rebellion. He give us life, sight, hearing. GOD redirects us, back to our original design so that we find Jesus irresistible!

Ephesians 2:5, "God makes us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace that you've been saved. And raised us up with Christ..."

Depravity means our hearts are desperately sick and beyond cure:

God, through the Holy Spirit, gives us new hearts that believe. He makes us alive!

Deuteronomy 30:6, "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts...so that you may love him with all your heart...and live."

Ezekiel 11:19, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees..."

Ezekiel 36:26, “And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

John 1:12-13, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

John 3:3, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Colossians 2:13, “When you were dead in your sins in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.”

Titus 3:5, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

1 John 1:3, “In His great mercy he has given us new birth...”

Depravity means our eyes are blinded:

God opens our eyes.

Matthew 11:25-26, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

Matthew 13:11, “The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

Acts 16:14, “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

Depravity means with respect to salvation we will always choose wrongly:

God gives us faith and repentance.

Ephesians 2:8, “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith- **(point out this note)** and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

2 Timothy 2:25, “...in hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Matthew 16:16-17, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God... ‘Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.’”

Acts 11:18, “God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

Acts 5:31, “...that [God] might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”

Acts 18:27, “...those who by grace had believed.”

Philippians 1:29, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,”

John 6:63, “The spirit gives life...”

John 6:65, “No one will find Jesus attractive, irresistible...unless God does something in them first.”

Clarification

--If we are totally depraved, then it is grace that moves God to break through our hostility...it cannot be anything else. It must then be an unearned gift. Any belief on our part must be because we have been born again.

1 John 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is (perfect tense- literally “has been”) born of God.”

You’ve been given a new heart, new eyes, and God has done it.

--The word **irresistible** is confusing...it does NOT mean we cannot resist God’s grace. People resist God’s grace all the time.

Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: you always resist the Holy Spirit!”

Romans 10:21, “But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.’”

Irresistible grace does not mean we can’t or don’t resist Him! It means that God can overcome our resistance when He wants to! God can break through our rebellion.

--Tell me how you were saved- now where did that come from? God is at the bottom of it all...

--The only way to consistently deny the doctrine of irresistible grace is to deny that human nature is inherently sinful and hostile to God. (These things flow together, if Total Depravity is true...then this must follow) But if we truly are “spiritually dead,” then God must be the one who takes initiative in salvation. He must make us alive- regeneration- before we will ever believe.

OR you have to say that the Bible teaches every person has been made partially alive, has been given partial illumination...so that now every person may or may not choose to follow Christ, but is this working backwards, forcing something onto the Scripture that isn’t there? It goes like this...if we all have been given a choice, an external call to believe the Gospel, then it is only logical to say that we must all have the ability to believe, which is to say there is no one who is truly hostile towards God- we’ve all been brought back to a place of neutrality, from which we all then must choose to accept or reject. The problem is: does the Bible really teach this? AND I don’t know anyone who is really neutral. We are all running from God and if we find grace to be irresistible, that must mean God is at work in us, drawing us to Himself.

Bottom line: ultimately it is God's work, not ours. He therefore gets all the glory. Amazing grace.

Questions

a) All I know is that when offered the gospel, I believed...I made a decision, I repented, I trusted? I am the one who made the decision? I was not dragged into it against my will?

This is my own story- in 1995, I heard the gospel and I responded.

When we first become a Christian, naturally we know what we were thinking at the time and what we did...but over time we should come to know more of God's heart and what HE was thinking and what HE did.

The longer we are Christians, the more we should come to realize that God was behind it all.

--The lifeboat and the oar

b) Why does God choose to send people to hell?

Bad question- if God chooses to rescue some, that does not mean he has thereby caused the condemnation of others.

One fundamental characteristic of sin is that I am responsible for my own sin...if I stand condemned it is my own fault. If I reap the punishment for that, it is still my fault.

If someone else pays the fine for my cellmate and he is released from his condemnation, my sin and my punishment is still my fault.

Better question- If it's up to God to initiate, if God is free to choose to regenerate some, why wouldn't a loving God freely choose to regenerate all?

Why does God choose to break through some people's rebellion and not others? This is what we all want/need to ask.

--I don't know

--God is not in the dock- owing us an answer- Romans 9

--God is somehow glorified in the salvation of the elect and the condemnation of some

--If the Calvinist view is unloving because God doesn't choose to save everyone...how is it more loving for God to want you to be saved but constrain his will by what you choose??

--We all have to answer the question...and no one has a good answer.

--Wait for the next point

c) More?

Takeaway: if #1 is true, then God has to do something...it's all grace.

3) (U) -Unconditional Election

"If all of us are so depraved that we cannot come to God without being born again by the irresistible grace of God, then it is clear that the salvation of any of us is owing to God's election. Election refers to God's choosing whom to save. It is unconditional in that there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no condition he can meet before God chooses to save him from his deadness." - Dr. John Piper

Mark Richt's adoption story

They have adopted 2 kids from Ukraine...a boy and a little girl named Anya. I don't cry a lot watching espn but...Anya has a facial deformity...they went over and said, we knew no one else would want her. They set their love on her and adopted her.

Never think about election or anything apart from the heart of God. We tend to get cerebral.

He is a lot more loving than you. We want to say God is mean, cruel...if it seems that way...we must be wrong. God isn't those things. The Bible never says God is mean and cruel...quite the opposite.

When God makes someone alive, He does it according to plan. God knows what He is going to do before He does it, He has a plan. **That plan is called election.**

Irresistible Grace is the HOW of salvation, Unconditional Election is the WHY

Since His plan was made before we had anything to offer, before we met any conditions...it is **unconditional.**

(I put the I before the U because that is the way we experience salvation...and I think it is important to understand how we are saved first. Then we should learn why we are saved.

Anya was told the story over and over again how her parent flew on a plane and snatched her up...and one day she will be told why they did it...because Mark and his wife had a huge heart.

I...how we are saved.

U...why we are saved.

God has a group of people the Bible calls the elect (chosen ones), and He has chosen these people to be His own.

Deuteronomy 4:37; Deuteronomy 10:14-15; Psalm 33:12; Psalm 65:4; Psalm 106:5; Haggai 2:23; Matthew 11:27; Matthew 22:14; Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:28-30, 33; Romans 11:28; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; Titus 1:1; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Peter 2:8-9; Revelation 17:14

God has chosen these people to be His own before they chose Him.

John 15:16; Acts 13:48; Romans 9:11-16; Romans 10:20; Romans 11:4-6; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:8; Revelation 17:8

God has chosen these people to be His own, before they chose Him, on the basis of His will alone, and not on the basis of anything He saw or foresaw in them- to the praise of His glorious grace.

Exodus 33:19; Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Romans 11:33-36; Ephesians 1:5, Ephesians 1:6; Ephesians 1:11

Clarification

--God is the "I AM" He did not have a beginning. He is Creator, we are created beings- therefore His plan is supreme- everything, including salvation, unfolds according to His perfect will.

--While most agree there is a plan of election, some suggest that God chooses people before the foundation of the world on the basis of foreseen faith. This is done to protect our free will. In other words, it is the individual's faith that is the cause of God's choosing them.

The word foreknowledge in Scripture can mean both foreknowledge of people or foreknowledge of something else. But in the context of Romans 8:29, God foreknew, predestined, called, justified *individual people*. 1 Peter 1:1-2, God foreknew *people*. Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus is speaking about knowing *people*. Jesus says, depart from me I never knew you. (to know- intimate)

It is inconsistent to say that God already knew who would be saved AND God is trying to save every person. If God foresaw which sinners would not choose Him and be lost, then it is inconsistent to teach that it is not within God's will to allow these sinners to be lost. This contradiction has led some people to the Open Theism idea that God does not have any foreknowledge at all.

If God saw who would be saved and who would NOT- and yet He didn't do anything about it, we still have the same problem? Why?

Bottom line: The doctrine of election is supposed to be beautiful. If divorced from the infinitely good nature of God, then it is meaningless. This can be an emotional topic and that is ok, but it is supposed to bring out emotions of wonder and awe, not confusion and anger.

Questions

a) Why didn't God choose everyone to be elect?

--We don't know.

b) Do We Belong to God Because We Come to Jesus, or Do We Come to Jesus Because We Belong to God?

--John 17:6-9, "*I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. . . . I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.*"

John 6:37-39, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.*"

c) Are we Jesus' sheep because we believe? Or do we believe because we are Jesus' sheep?

John 10:24-27, "How long will keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

d) If God has already planned who is elect, why should we preach the gospel?

--He has planned the **end** yes, but he has also planned the **means** to the end (the preaching of the Gospel, Romans 10:14). No one can come to the Father without an internal call, without being made alive by the Holy Spirit, without regeneration...but the external call of the Gospel is always the instrument the Spirit uses to work the inward call.

e) If God has already planned who is elect, why should we pray for people to be saved?

--Again, He has planned both the end and the means to the end...one of the means by which God saves people, along with the preaching of the Gospel, is our prayers. We do not know who is elect and who is not, we are called to share the good news and pray diligently.

Doesn't this idea lead to pride? Answer this at the end?

Takeaway: These points flow from Total Depravity...if you mess with T then you can mess with the others. We can't think about any of our questions apart from the fact that we all have a debt to pay!

--God is glorified both in mercy and in justice.

--Why would God create someone He knew would not be able to choose Him? Rom. 9, I don't know, I just know we all have this problem...If God Knows, but doesn't do anything...is that better?

How is allowing us to choose more loving if we are choosing wrong? If my house is burning down, it is not more loving to sit back and let me choose, come in and get me!

4) (L)- Limited Atonement

I had rather believe a limited atonement that is efficacious for all men for whom it was intended, than a universal atonement that is not efficacious for anybody, except the will of man be joined with it." —Charles Spurgeon

Some prefer to use Particular (limited is not a great word) atonement- **the death of Christ had a particular design and purpose towards the elect rather than a general design and purpose towards all people**

First, what is atonement?

--The atonement is the work of God, in Christ, (at one moment) by his obedience and death, by which he absorbed/ cancelled the debt of our sin, appeased his holy wrath against us, and won for us all the benefits of salvation.

--We all agree atonement was necessary because of our total depravity.

How is the death of Christ explained in the Bible?

Sacrifice- 1 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 9:26, sacrifices in the OT were always substitutionary, where the sacrificed animal was killed in the place of the sinner.

Propitiation- Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10, atoning sacrifice (means to turn aside the wrath of God from us by taking it upon himself- like a lightning rod on a house, channels the lightning bolt away from the house and into the ground)

Redemption- Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:20, slave market term, ransom from captivity, purchase, buy back (*just like God is doing in the world- buying it back from the control of evil*)

What was the design or purpose of the death of Christ? What did it do for us? John 17:4 (there is a task God has sent Jesus to do) what was that task? **John 6:37-40** (the will of the one who sent Jesus was that he would lose none...to purchase back, be an atoning sacrifice for a group of people)

Did the death of Christ make possible the salvation of all but guarantee salvation for none? Or did the death of Christ guarantee the full and complete salvation for the elect?

Matthew 1:21; John 10:11, 11:50-53; Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 2:17; Matthew 20:28, 26:28; Romans 8:32-34; Mark 10:45; Acts 5:31; Luke 19:10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:3-4; Galatians 3:13; Colossians 1:22; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 13:12; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18

These verses say, the death of Jesus: makes people holy, cleanses them, forgives them, buys them back, ransom, the death of Jesus does all those things for people.

Did Jesus do that for everyone? If that is what the death of Jesus accomplishes...does Jesus does this for everyone? It would be unjust for God to allow someone to be in hell who's sins have been taken away and cleansed.

So the death of Christ accomplishes all this for individual people. In John 17:4 Jesus says, "*I have brought you glory on earth, by completing the work you gave me to do.*" Christ came to accomplish the will of His Father. John 6:37-40, "*The Father's will is that He would save all of the people that were given to him to save. And that he should lose none of those given to him.*"

Clarification

All views "limit" the atonement. Either it is limited in effect (what it does) or limited in scope (who it applies to). Some people limit the power of the atonement- Christ's death itself did not secure salvation...for he died for all generally but not effectively. Some people limit the design of the atonement- Christ's death secured the full salvation of all the elect, dying not simply for the possibility of salvation but its fulfillment. When Christ uttered the phrase on the cross, "*It is finished,*" he had in mind that his sacrifice was sufficient for all who will believe.

--What about John 3:16, "*God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life?*"

God so loved the entire world, that He gave His son 'in such a way', or 'so that' anyone who believes will be saved by his death/resurrection. Everyone agrees on this, all who believe will be saved by the atonement of Christ. Reservoir so big that all who believe...shall be saved.

--This tends to be the most argued point...and we may not like everything the Bible teaches (I understand this), but we have to adjust what we like to the teaching of the Bible. Particular atonement teaches that the blood of Jesus purchased, ransomed, turned away God's judgment, saved his bride...he didn't do this for everyone or else everyone would be saved.

--The term **limited** is unfortunate because the Calvinist actually believes the atonement doesn't just bring people back to neutral and then wait for humans to do their part...they believe the atonement purchased the full salvation for a **particular** group of people. **Romans 8:29-30**, *Paul is talking about the same group of people...all of it is true- all past tense! It does not say "some" of those...God does all of this for the same group of people.*

--Christ loves everyone in the world and he loves his bride differently.

His death is so powerful that anyone who believes will be saved!

Questions

a) What about the passages that say Jesus died for all? (it is my responsibility to deal with these!)

John 1:29, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*"

John 3:16-17, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*"

John 4:42, "*...and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.*"

Romans 5:18, "*...just as the result of one man's trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*"

2 Corinthians 5:19, "*...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*"

1 Timothy 2:4-6, "*This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth...the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...*"

Hebrews 2:9, "*...so that by the grace of God (Jesus) might taste death for everyone.*"

1 John 2:2, "*(Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

1 John 4:14, "*...the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*"

So...one option is to say that the Bible teaches universalism. All people in the world shall be saved.

If He is the savior of the world (and if the world means everyone in the world)- then everyone is saved.

If he takes away the sin of the world (and if the world means everyone in the world)- then everyone is without sin and therefore saved. You cannot be in hell if your sins have been taken away from you.

If he gave a ransom for all men, tasted death for every man, turned aside God's wrath for everyone...then everyone **MUST** be saved.

Another option is to say that there is a contradiction in the Bible. Some verses say Christ died for every person, and some verses say Christ died for the elect (his sheep, his bride). We just need to pick one set of verses and move on.

--But what is your view of God's Word? Do you have a presupposition that says there cannot be contradictions in the Bible? (The Bible must be all right- it claims to be!)

So, if all can't mean every person, since every person is clearly not saved... there must be cases where all does not mean every person without exception. If that is true- then what does it mean? Is this just word games?

b) Does the word all in the Bible always mean every person? Mark 1:5, Acts 22:15, Matthew 10:22, John 3:26. Sometimes the word all can mean "all without distinction." All without distinction means that Christ died to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

If you say that Christ died for all sinners in such a way that if you repent and believe in Christ, then his death becomes effective in your case, and your sins will be forgiven...then that is true!

The atonement of Christ created a reservoir so big that anyone who believes will be saved. BUT that purchase also will bring about the faith in those whom God has unconditionally elected...and that is a difficult teaching of the Bible.

c) More?

God centered view vs. a man-centered view- everything God does happens for us/ or for Him?

5) (P)- Perseverance of the Saints

"The saints are the sinners who keep going." -Robert Louis Stevenson

Everyone wants to believe this! In the ups and downs of the Christian life (spiritual highs/lows, days we believe and days we doubt) how do we know we won't fall away from God?

God will persevere every believer in Christ. This is a logical conclusion to the point before it...if they are chosen, called, made alive, on the basis of God's will alone...and if Christ's death guaranteed their full salvation...then it follows that God will assure their final salvation- they will persevere to the end.

If you did not DO anything to earn your salvation, then there is nothing you can DO to make it be taken away
Romans 8:29, *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...and those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*

The great chain of salvation CANNOT be broken. Nothing, not even YOU- can change God's eternal plan.
Romans 8:31-39...No one who is against us will win us from God, no one can bring a worthy charge against us who are justified, nothing...not death nor life, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jeremiah 32:40- it is God's character that matters, not yours.

John 10:29, *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."*

Isaiah 43:1-3, 54:10; Jeremiah 32:40; Matthew 18:12-14; John 3:16, 36; John 5:24, John 6:35-40, 47; John 10:27-30; John 17:11-12, 15; Romans 5:8-10; Romans 8:1; Romans 8:29-39; 1 Corinthians 1:7-9, 10:13; 2 Corinthians 4:14, 17; Ephesians 1:5, 13-14; Ephesians 4:30; Colossians 3:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12, 4:18; Hebrews 9:12, 15, Hebrews 10:14; Hebrews 12:28; **1 Peter 1:3-5**; 1 John 2:19, 25; 1 John 5:4, 11-13, 20; Jude 1:24-45

The Bible also teaches that the true believer will continue in the faith, and not turn back into a life of sin.

Matthew 7:16-18, *"By their fruit you will recognize them...every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."*

(The apples on an apple tree don't give it life, they just prove that it is alive)

The proof God is persevering someone is fruit!

So, the perseverance of the believer has two sides- security and perseverance. One cannot exist without the other. The popular doctrine of "once saved, always saved" overlooks or neglects the necessity of perseverance as the proof of true salvation.

Clarification

According to Jesus, the fruit (conduct of one's life) tells you something about a person. A saved person will bring forth good fruit (good conduct of life, Jesus is their savior). A saved person's conduct of life will not be consistently evil. A lost person will bring forth bad fruit (an improper conduct of life, something else will be their savior).

The basis of the perseverance of the saints is their preservation by God Himself. Why do the saints persevere? God keeps them (Philippians 1:6). God always completes the full work of salvation (Romans 8:28-30). Christ himself intercedes for them (Romans 8:34).

The Bible does teach that a Christian can "neglect the means of their preservation, fall into sin, and for a time remain there, possibly grieving the Holy Spirit...but they will bring discipline on themselves from God with the hope of restoring them to Himself." WCF 17.1,3

Eternal security is the objective reality which true believers possess...

Assurance is the experiential certainty of one's eternal security...(we don't always experience this)

One is fact/ one is feeling

Questions

a) How is this different from "once-saved always-saved?"

-While it emphasizes the eternal security a Christian has in Christ, it also emphasizes the transformation that will/must occur as God preserves him/her. This is both a promise and a caution. Our spirits testify with the Holy Spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16).

b) What about people who fall away from the faith?

According to Scripture, they only show that they never belonged to Christ.

1 John 2:19, "*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*"

Hebrews 3:13, "*But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*"

c) What about the verses that say we will be saved IF we hold firmly to the end?

-Hebrews 3:14, "*We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first.*"

-Remembering what we have already shown the Bible to teach, these verses cannot be saying that our salvation is caused by our faithfulness, for our faithfulness is produced by our salvation!

Perseverance does not make someone a Christian, but it proves one is a Christian.

d) So how do I know if God will keep me unto the end?

-According to the Bible, when Jesus makes you his own...he keeps you.

So then how do I know if I'm one of his own?

Believe!!!! And then you know you're elect.

e) End with Romans 11:33-36

COMMON QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

(from Jeff Ferguson's, *Unbelievable Grace: The Five Points of Calvinism*)

While the strongest argument for Reformed and Calvinistic theology is the testimony of Scripture itself, there are many common questions raised as people wrestle with the Biblical texts like the ones listed above. The following section is a small attempt to deal concisely with some of the more common questions resulting from a study of these Scriptural truths. However, the answers are far from exhaustive and cannot replace the diligent use of the means of grace (Word, sacraments, prayer) in seeking out the Wisdom of God.

I. QUESTIONS REGARDING BIBLICAL TEXTS

A. If you can't lose your salvation, why is the Bible full of passages about falling away?

If the visible church only consisted of the Elect, this would be a great problem. However, the church is full of true believers *and* those who profess Christ with their mouth but do not truly believe with their hearts—they are deceived (Acts 5:1-11). Such warnings call every member of the church, true believer and deceived sinner, to examine his heart, repent, and look fully to Christ alone for salvation.

B. Doesn't the Bible say that Jesus died for "all", for the "world"?

"When we speak of Christ dying 'for' someone, we are referring to the 'substitutionary' atonement. We mean that Christ died in the place of the sinner, bearing his penalty for him. Since the price of sin has been actually paid by the Savior, those for whom He laid down His life cannot hereafter be punished for their sins. The punishment has already been borne by their Substitute. 'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God' (1 Peter 3:18). Therefore, if Christ actually died 'for' each and every person who lives, then the penalty of their sins has been laid upon the Savior as their Substitute – and nobody may be justly sent to hell for those sins anymore. Those who teach that Jesus died for every single individual must eventually give up either the substitutionary nature of the atonement, the doctrine of everlasting punishment, or the justice of God. Because the Bible is the word of God and cannot, then, contradict itself, it is not an option for us to interpret those passages which say that Christ died for 'all' (or for the 'world') as meaning that He died for all without exception. They must rather mean that He died for all without distinction – that is, He died for 'all kinds' of men. Indeed, this is an important Biblical truth found in many places. Christ died for Jews and Gentiles alike. He died for men and women, from all tribes and tongues and nations. His saving work was for the entire world." (Quoted from Greg Bahnsen, "Cross-Examination: Particular Redemption," *The Counsel of Chalcedon* XIII:4 [June, 1991]).

C. Doesn't God want all men to be saved? Why doesn't He save them all?

If God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:3, 4) but does not actually save all men, are His desires (indeed, even His words) trustworthy and genuine? *Apparently* what

God says He wants (His revealed will) and what He does (His decrees) are in conflict. The Arminian resolves this question by concluding that God's salvation is *conditional* upon man's decision to believe. God, therefore, *does* want salvation for all men, but it is up to men. But the Arminian falls into the same trap he sought to avoid. God still created a world where people would not believe, *in direct contradiction with His revealed will*. Is God then weak? Or subject to Fate?

Logical analysis of this issue can be daunting. The Bible deals with this issue in much the same way as it deals with God's sovereignty and man's responsibility—at the deepest levels it remains a mystery. God's desire that all men should be saved is very much like His desire that I be kind and loving towards my wife. He wants us to obey His commands (1 John 3:23), but he does not force us to do so. It is obvious upon looking at our own lives and the world around us that God's revealed will does not always come to fruition in this fallen world. God's decrees (what He has ordained), however, are always fulfilled. Unfortunately, we are not always aware of what these decrees are, and they remain a secret for God alone (Deut 29:29).

II. QUESTIONS REGARDING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

A. Does God's sovereignty contradict man's responsibility? Is God unfair to choose?

This apparent logical problem has plagued Christians for centuries and has manifested itself in all sorts of ways. The simple answer is this: God teaches in His word that He is the all-powerful Sovereign Who ordains whatsoever comes to pass *and* man is a moral agent responsible for all his thoughts and actions. Both are true. Is this logically impossible? Not really. The so-called Law of Non-Contradiction says that something cannot be true and not true at the same time. In other words, if the Bible taught that God was Sovereign *and* not sovereign, that would be contradictory. But to say that an infinite God can control all things without infringing on the responsibility of man is no more contradictory than the Christian doctrines of the Trinity (both three and one) of the dual-natures of Christ (both God and man). Surely, the ways of this infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God are mysterious to us. But our real problem with this doctrine is not so much a result of our logical limitations; rather, we don't actually believe that God is *good*. We have fallen prey to the sinful nature that wants, with Adam and Eve, to "be like God." We want to decide what is good and bad, right or wrong, just or evil—and hold God accountable to our own standards. Paul deals with this issue in Rom 9:19-24—who are we to talk back to God? *He* is the source of all that is good, right, holy, and just. All that He does is consistent with these highest ideals because they flow from *His* nature. Yet we despise allowing God to have control of our salvation because *we think that we could do it better*. But such thinking is antithetical to fellowship and intimacy with God—it is rebellion. God save us from ourselves! So is wisdom proved right by her actions. If God does chose as the Scriptures teach, then we must believe that He remained perfect, holy, just, merciful, righteous, compassionate, and kind in making that choice. That God chose at all is remarkable, given the great rebellion that has engaged all of mankind. All of us deserve His wrath. He was not obligated to save any, yet He has redeemed a countless number of people for Himself. Was it fair? No, it was *grace*.

B. What about free will? How can God hold us accountable if we are unable to obey?

When the Calvinist claims that man has *no free will*, he simply means that without the work of God's grace in the heart, no one comes willingly to faith in Christ. He is not referring to the choices people make to spend money, go to school, answer the

phone, etc. But even these choices are a result of the nature and character of our hearts. We cannot do what we are incapable of doing. Man is bound by his nature. He may will to sprout wings and fly like a bird, but such is not in his nature. Likewise, if fallen man is in bondage and slavery to sin and death as the Bible teaches (Romans 6), then he cannot act contrary to that nature. One might say (with many qualifications and much trembling) that God Himself is bound by His nature. After all, no one expects that God, who is infinitely good, holy, and just, to start sinning or to start forcing others to sin (in fact, James 1 explicitly refutes this). Why then, do we expect sinners to suddenly turn to Christ without any help? In fact, our wills are bent against this. The Scriptures clearly teach that the sinner's *only* hope is God's grace. Charles Spurgeon elaborates: " 'Oh!... men may be saved if they will.' We reply, 'My dear sir, we all believe that; but it is just the "if they will" that is the difficulty. We assert that no man will come to Christ unless he be drawn; nay, we do not assert it, but Christ himself declares it—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;" and as long as that "ye will not come" stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will.' It is strange how people, when talking about free-will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. 'Now,' says one, 'I believe men can be saved if they will.' My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained towards Christ." The Arminian response to the Bible's teaching on man's sinful nature encounters many problems and pitfalls. Some deny that man has a sinful nature that prevents him from pursuing God—in other words, man is able, by nature, to chose or reject God. If so, why do we need to be "saved" from sin? This teaching does not hold up well to Scriptural scrutiny. Many who recognize man's sinful nature want to assert that man's inability limits his obligations. In other words, since he can't obey the law, God is unjust to hold him accountable. Yet Rom 3:5-8 explicitly rejects this claim— man is always responsible for his actions. Others suggest that God gives everyone the ability to believe—something commonly called "prevenient grace." But then the Arminian faces a worse problem—if everyone *can* believe, why do many not? One might ask the Arminian to explain further—exactly what is the human will free *from*? The effects of sin? The desires of the heart? Some form of robotic control? Moreover, what exactly happened to humanity in the Fall? The Calvinist maintains that God did not create us bound by sin. Adam was made upright, holy, and pure. Surely his will was free in a way we struggle to comprehend. He was our *perfect* representative... yet he still fell. In his Fall, he brought all of us under his condemnation (Romans 5). "That's not fair!" some will say. "I would have done better!" Really? We are steeped in sin and can't even keep our own standards of righteousness (how many red lights have you run this week?). How can we believe we would have done better than sinless Adam? But if we reject Adam as our representative, we must also reject Christ. For our salvation from sin rests in Christ representing us to God (in a better way than Adam did—Romans 5). But in our fallen state, apart from Christ, there is no will (free or otherwise) able to trust in Him.

C. Didn't God predestine those He foresaw would repent and believe?

In other words, is the individual's faith the *cause* or *result* of God's predestination? The Biblical use of "to know" in both Old and New Testaments is consistently personal in nature. For example, in Matt 7:22-23, Jesus rejects the false believers because He never knew **them**, *despite the fact that He knew their actions*. So it is with God's foreknowledge. Rom 8:29 refers to "*those* whom He foreknew," the people "called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). God foreknew a people, not their actions—a believer's faith is a *result* of God's work (Eph 2:8-9). The Arminian response to this has its own problems. No Arminian can consistently assert both that (1) God already knew who would be saved and (2) God is trying to save every person. No Arminian could, without being inconsistent, say that God foresaw which sinners would be lost and then, without blinking an eye, teach that it is not within God's will to allow these sinners to be lost. The Arminian cannot reject Calvinism without contradicting himself (which is why many in the Open Theism movement have denied that God has complete foreknowledge at all).

III. QUESTIONS REGARDING OUR EXPERIENCE

A. Doesn't Calvinism result in apathetic Christians?

In other words, if it is all up to God, why should I worry about anything? There is an old saying along these lines: "You're damned if you do; you're damned if you don't." But this sort of thinking misrepresents Calvinistic doctrine on at least two points. First, it denies the Biblical teaching regarding both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, resulting in a fatalistic approach to life. Paul addresses a similar question in Rom 3:5-8: "But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just." In other words, you can't use God's sovereignty as an excuse to escape your own moral responsibility. Repent and believe. Second, it denies the organic, historical, experiential aspects of God's salvation. God's salvation is not simply "pie-in-the-sky" thinking. It brings about a radical transformation of heart and life. Faith that does not result in works is dead (James 2). True faith leads to obedience and love.

B. Doesn't Calvinism make evangelism "unnecessary"?

Quite the contrary, Calvinism is a powerful motivation for evangelism. John Calvin himself is credited with starting one of the most far-reaching missions movements of the Reformation. The inward call of the Spirit does not occur within a vacuum; rather, the Spirit works through the Word (read but especially preached) to bring sinners to Christ. The Calvinist can share the Gospel with confidence, knowing that the Word will go forth with power as the Spirit works. We don't know who the Elect are, so we are to proclaim Christ to everyone, leaving the work of conversion to God. What a motivation to proclaim the Gospel—God is at work! The Arminian, however, must ultimately trust in his own eloquence and clarity to convince the sinner to choose

Christ. God, in his view, will only do so much to help, the rest of the responsibility is on the Christian. How frightening! What if you don't know an answer? What if you "mess up"? But thanks be to God—He changes hearts through jars of clay such as us (2 Cor 4:1-7).

C. Doesn't Calvinism result in pride from being "chosen"?

It is true that many who hold Calvinistic doctrines are unbearably prideful. They look down their noses at those who have not "arrived" at their high level of spirituality and theological acumen. However, these Calvinistic Christians are sadly deceived and steeped in sin. They have fallen in love with a system of doctrine and not with Christ. If anything, the Calvinist should be humble before God and man. Why are they the recipients of grace? What in them merits such kindness from God? Absolutely nothing. But for the grace of God, they would be without hope in this dark and dreadful world. But the Arminian, ultimately, places the final work of salvation in the hands of man—he chooses to follow God. But why? What makes the Arminian Christian different from his non-Christian neighbor? Why did one believe and the other reject the Gospel? The consistent Arminian must say (with pride?) that he was smarter, more spiritual, or better in some way because his choice was more wise than that of the non-Christian. The Calvinist, on the other hand, must stand in awe before God, for he knows that there is *nothing at all* in him that merited such grace.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

All of the above material was taken from the resources below. Any failure to cite particular sources in context is a failure of the author alone.

I. BOOKS

Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). *Kuyper makes the point that Calvinism, far from being some esoteric philosophy, is the imminently practical, life-changing theology of the Bible.*

Richard Belcher, *A Journey in Grace* (Columbia: Richbarry Press, 1990). *This is a great book to read through each point in the form of a story.*

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955). *Murray isn't the most exciting read, but he is clear and thorough, even in this short little book.*

J. I. Packer, "Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*," online at www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/packer_intro.html. *This essay is a classic and worth reading several times.*

W. J. Seaton, "The Five Points of Calvinism" (pamphlet; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970).

David Steele, Curtis Thomas, and S. Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (2nd ed.; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004). ***This book has a HUGE bibliography of resources regarding Calvinism.***

B. B. Warfield, *God's Plan of Salvation* (rev ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). *This is a great comparison of various systems of Christian theology. Very short.*

II. ON THE WEB

Monergism – www.monergism.com – *Simply the best "all-in-one-place" website for studying the doctrines of grace. You almost don't need to go anywhere else.*

Third Millennium Ministries – www.thirdmill.org – *Dr. Richard Pratt's online ministry. Great Q&A section and downloadable sermons.*

The Gospel Coalition- www.thegospelcoalition.org –Great resource pulled from multiple traditions

Desiring God Ministries- www.desiringgod.org –Dr. John Piper has sermons/notes on each of these points

A Puritan's Mind – www.apuritansmind.com – *Articles from the Puritan theologians of old.*

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry – www.carm.org – *A great place to study and evaluate the claims made by other religions in comparison to Christianity.*



Calvinism Seminar
RUF Summer Conference 2012
Tom Franklin, RUF @ Birmingham Southern College

NOTES