

# CALVINISM

## INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries of church history, better minds than ours have struggled in efforts to harmonize two aspects of God’s wonderful Truth — Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Both are clearly taught in the Word of God. And we must believe both, even though our finite minds cannot fully comprehend just how each so marvelously complements the other.

Although there are considerable differences among those who carry the “Calvinist” label, the purpose of this paper is to examine Classical five-point Calvinism of Reformed Theology<sup>1</sup> and highlight concepts that are in conflict with Biblical truth.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Calvinism, often referred to as *The Reformed Faith* by Reformed theologians, developed mostly from editions of John Calvin’s classic, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*,<sup>2</sup> the Synod of Dort, and Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), although a teacher in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, had some differences with certain tenets of Calvinism. In 1610 his followers, called Remonstrants, presented their concerns in “The Five Articles of the Remonstrantia” to the states of Holland and West Freisland. The ensuing eight years of dissension and debate were finally “settled” at the Great Synod of Dordrecht (Dordt/Dort). There the Counter-Remonstrants issued their five Canons of Dordt from whence came the so-called “five points of Calvinism.”<sup>3</sup> Although Calvin (1509-1564) did not create these five canons, they “could not only be traced back to the Calvin Reformation; they could be traced back to the theology of Saint Augustine.... For it was Augustine who had originally defined these truths. Calvin himself, again and again, pays tribute to the work of Augustine and points out that what he is saying has been said before him by the Bishop of Hippo.”<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this paper we will discuss our differences with Classical/Historical Calvinism in the traditional order of the five points using the acrostic, T-U-L-I-P, even though their titles and order differs some from the Canons of Dordt.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Five-point Calvinism is also held by those identified generally as “Reformed Baptists” who reject infant baptism. These would include J.Piper, J. White, and A Mohler Jr. (SBC) who sometimes trace their roots back to men like J. Bunyan, J. Gill, and C. H. Spurgeon. The development of this movement with its present variations are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition was published in 1536 when Calvin was 27 years old, about three years after his conversion to Protestant thinking. The final revision of 1559, though “five times larger than the original...fully preserved the identity of doctrine...” L. Qualben, *A History of the Christian Church*, (NY: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1942), 265.

<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the 1619 *Belgic Confession*. From the 1640s, the *Westminster Standards*, (Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms) have served very well as unifying instruments for Reformed teaching.

<sup>4</sup> H. Hanko, H. Hoeksema, & G. Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Granville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1976). [www.prc.org/fivepoints/chapter1.html](http://www.prc.org/fivepoints/chapter1.html) “Calvin had a precocious knowledge of Augustine and made Augustine his constant reading. On the doctrines of the will, predestination, and the sacraments, Calvin borrowed quite freely from Augustine.” Edwin A. Blum, “Augustine, The Bishop and Theologian,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan.-Mar., 1981, 58.

<sup>5</sup> These Canons were outlined under five “Heads of Doctrine.” See [http://www.prc.org/cd\\_text1.html](http://www.prc.org/cd_text1.html)

## *I. T — TOTAL DEPRAVITY*

**Total Inability** — Under “Calvinism” *total depravity* is often understood as *total inability*. “When Calvin and the fathers of Dordt insisted that depravity was total, they... intended that the expression ‘total depravity’ be a description of what Scripture calls ‘death.’ The sinner is dead; spiritually dead.... He is not sick.... He is dead.”<sup>6</sup> And “because the unregenerate are spiritually dead...then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything.”<sup>7</sup> Without the power of the Holy Spirit, the natural man is blind and deaf to the message of the gospel.... This is why Total Depravity has also been called ‘Total Inability.’ The man without a knowledge of God will never come to this knowledge without God’s making him alive through Christ....”<sup>8</sup> Total inability is closely related to the doctrine of *the bondage of man’s will*.

**Bondage of the will** — Since unregenerate man is dead, “his mind is so filled with the darkness of the lie that there is no room for the truth in it. The same is true of man’s will. The bondage of the will describes man’s state precisely. His will is bound — bound by sin.... The sinner does not, but also cannot will the good. This is his nature. He is dead. Can a dead man think? Can a dead man will?”<sup>9</sup> Although the will is bound, “man is free — one hundred percent free — free to do exactly what he wants.... He follows his heart’s desires. Because his heart is rotten and inclined to all kinds of evil, he freely does what he wants to do, namely, sin.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, “the *sinner’s will* is *biased toward evil*, and therefore is free in one direction only, namely, in the direction of evil. The sinner’s will is *enslaved* because it is in bondage to and is the servant of a depraved heart.... [The] sinner is not free to do *either* good or evil, because an evil heart within is ever inclining him toward sin.... Total depravity means that man is, in spirit and soul and body, the slave of sin and the captive of the Devil.... There is a moral inability which paralyzes him.... The will is under the dominion of sin and Satan. Therefore the will is not free.... The sinner is not a free agent because he is a slave to sin.... Man is a rational being and as such responsible and accountable to God, but to affirm that he is a *free* moral agent *is to deny that he is totally depraved* — i.e., depraved in will as in everything else.... Man is impotent as to his will” (author’s emphasis).<sup>11</sup> Therefore most Calvinists conclude that it is thus “a fact that each of the non-elect is unable [and/or unwilling] to repent and believe.”<sup>12</sup>

Both Scripture and human experience demonstrate that man’s depravity is “total.” Scripture teaches the doctrine of original sin — that since the fall of Adam all men are born in sin with Adam’s depraved carnal nature. Although no one has exhausted his capacity for sinning, there is no part of man’s nature that was not affected by sin. Man is totally depraved, unable to change his inborn sinful nature. Man’s heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hanko, Hoeksema & Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, [www.prca.org/fivepoints/chapter1.html](http://www.prca.org/fivepoints/chapter1.html)

<sup>7</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 72-73. Banner of Truth (UK) has published a revised edition, which omits chapters 5, 8 and 11 along with the four appendices.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Barlow, “*The Five Points of Calvinism*,” [www.reformed.org](http://www.reformed.org)

<sup>9</sup> Hanko, Hoeksema & Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism*.

<sup>10</sup> Edwin Palmer, *Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 135-138.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. Some Calvinists would say that although man is able, man is *unwilling*.

17:9). As unregenerate individuals all of us “were dead in trespasses and sins... and were by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:1-3). “There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who [of himself] seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10-11). However, Scripture nowhere states that man cannot respond to “the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk. 19:10). *Total depravity* does *not* mean *total inability* as taught by most Classical Calvinists.

In Calvinistic teaching the analogy of the unregenerate being *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1) is often taken beyond the limits of sound exposition. Death, whether physical or spiritual, means separation and not annihilation. Man was created in God’s image with mind, emotion, and will. He has the capacity to think, to believe, to feel, and to choose. By God’s grace these faculties, though deeply affected, have either not been totally lost through Adam’s fall or that common grace “restores to the sinner the ability to make a favorable response to God.”<sup>13</sup> After the fall God graciously gave man a conscience to distinguish good from evil (Rom. 2:14-15). A spiritually dead, totally depraved person is still able to feel the terrible weight and agony of a guilty conscience. He is still able to experience the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. And he can, if he will, understand and respond to the Gospel and place his trust in Christ alone. In other words, He can still exercise his will — even in a positive direction. Man is a free moral agent, even in his unregenerate state.

Man’s will is free within the limits imposed by the ultimate, sovereign will of our Creator God.<sup>14</sup> Even though God is not willing/wanting anyone to perish but rather that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), He has, in His sovereignty, given man the freedom and ability as a free moral agent to either obey or disobey Him. Although God’s Word and history has clearly demonstrated man’s depravity and inability to obey God *perfectly*, nevertheless *the basis or ground of human responsibility is human ability*. This must be why Jesus told the Jews, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Jn. 5:40). They *could*, but they *wouldn’t*! Is that not why God could justly hold them accountable? When weeping over Jerusalem He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not” (Matt. 23:37). *He would* but *they would not*! Thus, because of their unwillingness and rejection, their judgment was just. This is why God can justly command “all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30) and hold them accountable to do so. As one theologian has stated, “It would seem very strange if God should call upon all men everywhere to repent... and believe (Mk. 1:14-15) when only some [the elect] may receive the gift of repentance and faith.”<sup>15</sup> Another theologian expressed, that “sound reason demands that there is no responsibility where there is no ability to respond. It is not rational to hold someone responsible when they could not have responded. And God is not irrational. His omniscience means God is the most rational Being in the universe. Therefore, reason also demands that all moral creatures are morally free; that is, they have the ability to respond one way or another.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 155.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 396-397. See also Samuel Fisk, *Election & Predestination*, 57-59.

<sup>15</sup> Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 349.

<sup>16</sup> Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 29.

By God's grace, depraved man, with *free* will, can willingly accept Christ. Or he can reject Christ. The choice is his.

However, man with a free will has no capacity for saving himself. Salvation is of the Lord. We are saved by grace, God's unmerited favor. God has revealed Himself in Creation and in His spoken and written Word. He has given mankind a conscience. He has graciously taken the initiative to provide a marvelous redemption for us in Christ. God has graciously provided the means<sup>17</sup> whereby man can appropriate the Gospel by faith. Faith comes through hearing God's Word (Rom 10:17). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to *everyone who believes* (Rom. 1:16). It has pleased God, (in accordance with His sovereign will and grace), by the foolishness of preaching to save *those who believe* (1 Cor. 1:21b). He has graciously sent the Holy Spirit, who has come to reprove *the world* of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:7-11). Through these means God graciously *draws* people to Himself (John 6:44, 12:32). As they *hear* He opens hearts to believe the Gospel (Acts 16:14). It is the goodness/kindness of God that leads men to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He rewards those who, like Cornelius, earnestly seek Him (Heb. 11:6). No man can of his own free will save himself. "God is the *source* by which the new birth is given... but free will is the *means* by which it is received."<sup>18</sup>

## 2. U — UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Over the centuries, theologians have attempted to explain the sovereignty of God and the free will of man in relation to salvation. A number of ideas have been proposed to define concepts such as election and predestination. Many of these proposals can be grouped into four basic views: Unconditional Election, Conditional Election, Timeless Election and Corporate Election.

**Unconditional Election** — According to Calvinism, the election of individual believers is based on God's sovereign choice. God unconditionally elected individuals He would save based on His sovereign choice alone. This view emphasizes the importance of God's sovereign choice over a person's free will in election. God's foreknowledge is not the basis of His choice of individuals for salvation according to the view of unconditional election. In fact, many Calvinists redefine foreknowledge to mean foreordination.

In Calvinism total inability is closely related to "unconditional election" which has to do mostly with God's decree of predestination. John Calvin and most Calvinists equate predestination and election. Calvin, in a chapter titled, "Of the Eternal Election, By Which God Has Predestinated Some to Salvation and Others to Destruction," speaks of God electing "those whom He has predestined." He believed that "of the great body of mankind some should be predestinated to salvation, and others to destruction.... He does not adopt all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what He denies to others.... God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death.... [In other words:] By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that

---

<sup>17</sup> The term "means" does NOT refer to any sacraments, including baptism.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 59. The author is commenting on John 1:12-13.

he has been predestinated to life or to death.... God by His eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was His pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was His pleasure to doom to destruction... [T]hose whom He dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment.” (ICR3-21#1,3,7)<sup>19</sup> The Westminster Confession put it in these words: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it can not be either increased or diminished.” (WCF-3)<sup>20</sup> A notable Puritan Calvinist wrote that “there are two kinds of predestination, election and rejection or reprobation” which “depends upon no cause, reason, or outward condition, but proceeds purely from the will of Him [God] who predestines.”<sup>21</sup> Boettner wrote, “The choice of some to eternal life is as sovereign as if Christ were to pass through a graveyard and bid one here and another there to come forth, the reason for restoring one to life and leaving another in his grave could be found only in His good pleasure, and not in the dead themselves.... The Reformed Faith has held to the existence of an eternal, divine decree which... separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death.”<sup>22</sup>

Such deterministic thinking naturally has led to other conclusions. “If then God has foreordained *whatsoever* comes to pass [as declared in the Westminster Confession] then He must have decreed that vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved to suffer eternal-ly in the Lake of Fire.”<sup>23</sup> It is thus understandable that many Calvinists would agree that “1 Tim. 2:4 *cannot* teach that God *wills* the salvation of all mankind, or otherwise all mankind *would* be saved....”<sup>24</sup> Probably most Calvinists would agree with the Westminster Confession that God is not the author/cause of sin. However, some would say something like this: “Foreordination means God’s sovereign plan whereby He decides all that is to happen in the entire universe. God is behind everything. He decides and causes all things to happen that do happen.... He has foreordained everything ‘after the counsel of His will’ (Eph. 1:11): the moving of a finger, the beat-

---

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (1599 printing), Bk. 3, Ch. 21, Art. 1, 5, and 7 (Beveridge translation) <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 3, 3-4, 1664. [www.reformed.org/documents/westminster\\_conf\\_of\\_faith.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html) See also *Canons of Dordt*, “First Head of Doctrine on Predestination,” Articles 6, 7, 15. [www.prca.org/cd\\_text1.html](http://www.prca.org/cd_text1.html)

<sup>21</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 153-55. Cited in Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 134. These statements by Calvin and Ames sound like a supralapsarian form of “double predestination” labeled by many as “extreme/hyper” Calvinism. Concerning Ames’s view, Geisler writes, “Some Calvinists reject this form of ‘double predestination’ in favor of God simply ‘passing over’ the non-elect, but even they must admit that the result is the same: since God did not give them the desire to be saved ‘they are condemned to eternal misery’... All Calvinists, like it or not, must hold some form of double predestination — the logic of their position demands it.” Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 134, 206. See Boettner, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1932) Ch.10, “Total Inability” and Ch.11 “Unconditional Election.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/boettner/predest.iii.i.html>

<sup>23</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 (Emphasis his).

ing of a heart, the laughter of a girl, the mistake of a typist — *even sin*.”<sup>25</sup>

To say that *foreordination* (or predestination) means that God “decides and causes all things to happen that do happen... *even sin*” is tantamount to God *causing* sin. However, such a thing would necessitate God doing something contrary to His very nature — something which is impossible for God to do. For God can neither be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone to do evil. Each of us are enticed to do evil by our own lusts [inherited from Adam] which give birth to sin (James 1:13-15).

Romans 9-11 is often used by Calvinists to prove unconditional election. However, this passage of scripture is a continuation of Paul’s teaching on justification by faith, not works, but in relation to anticipated Jewish questions regarding their *national* election and temporary rejection by God as a nation. Although these chapters are used as support for Calvinistic teaching regarding individual, unconditional election and reprobation, numerous scholars are correct to say, “They do not discuss the doctrine of individual election and reprobation with reference to eternal destiny.”<sup>26</sup> Genesis 25:23 and the contexts of both Romans 9:8-13 and Malachi 1:2-3 make it clear that “Jacob” and “Esau” are references to nations, not individuals as such. God has a unique purpose for future blessing in and through elect Israel, a blessing that did not include the eternal salvation of every individual Jew throughout history.

Calvinism often defines God’s *foreknowledge* quite broadly. For instance, one has written, “When the term ‘know’ is used in connection with God, it often signifies to regard with favour, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the object in view.”<sup>27</sup> The author then applies this meaning for *know* to the word *foreknow*. “The ‘foreknowledge of God the Father’ does not here [1 Pet. 1:2] refer to His prescience of all things.... ‘Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father’ signifies, then, chosen by Him as the special objects of His approbation and love.... [They] were ‘foreknown’ by Him, i.e., were the definite objects of His eternal love.”<sup>28</sup> Another Calvinist writes, “Foreknowledge mentioned in Rom. 8:29 refers to *divine active delight*. It indicates that, in His own sovereign good pleasure, God set His love on certain individuals, electing them to everlasting life and glory.”<sup>29</sup> Many Calvinists have equated *foreknowledge* with either *election*, *foreordination* and/or *predestination*. “...God’s foreknowledge, therefore, is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination.”<sup>30</sup> “C.E.B. Cranfield says, the foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is ‘that special taking knowledge of a person which is God’s electing grace.’ Such foreknowledge is virtually the same as election.... He foreknows, i.e. elects

---

<sup>25</sup> Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 25. (Emphasis ours).

<sup>26</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 133. See pages 133-153 for fuller discussion. For other helpful discussions of Romans 9-11, see also Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 82-83; F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 336-420; Parkinson, *The Faith of God’s Elect*, 19-28; Fisk, *Election and Predestination*, 118-133; and *Calvinistic Paths Retraced*, 53-54, 59-60, 80, 87-88, 113, 204.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Distributed by Baker Book House, 1961), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 57-59.

<sup>29</sup> W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Romans* Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 282.

<sup>30</sup> J. MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*. Cited in Hunt, *What Love Is This*, 226.

a people for himself....”<sup>31</sup>

However, Scripture does not use the term foreknowledge so broadly. God, being omniscient, has always known and foreknown all things — temporal (past, present and future) and eternal.<sup>32</sup> This includes God’s foreknowledge of all believers, including the “*elect* sojourners” to whom Peter refers (1 Pet. 1:1). He has always known everything, even before there was time and history. In English, *to foreknow* is “to have foreknowledge of,” which simply means a “knowledge or awareness of something before its existence or occurrence; prescience.”<sup>33</sup> The word *foreknow* is the closest English equivalent for the Greek verb form, *proginosko*, which means about the same thing. It is used “five times in the New Testament,” and in “all cases it means *foreknow*. [Rom. 8:29; 11:2; Acts 26:5; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:17]. It does not mean *foreordain*. It signifies *prescience*, not *preelection*.”<sup>34</sup> Paul distinguishes *predestined* from *foreknew* with the latter preceding the former (Rom. 8:29). And in Peter’s use of the noun form (Acts 2:23), “He is distinguishing there between *foreknowledge* and *determinate counsel*.”<sup>35</sup> If God’s foreknowledge “is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination” and “virtually the same as [Calvinistic, unconditional] *election*,” then does it not follow that, since God *foreknows* every sinner’s sin, He has (of His own deliberate will) foreordained and chosen/elected all the sinful actions of mankind? And would that not make God Himself the cause of sin? Yet Scripture teaches that God is not the cause of sin.

**Conditional Election** — According to this view, the election of individual believers is based on God’s foreknowledge. God foreknew those individuals who would place their faith in Christ for salvation. Based on that foreknowledge, He elected those who would believe. This view emphasizes the importance of a person’s free will over God’s sovereign choice in election.

Conditional election is often associated with Arminianism. It could be considered the antithesis of the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election.

Concerning this view Dr. Ryrie wrote: “It is probably true to say that a great majority of evangelicals consciously or unconsciously hold this concept of election.”<sup>36</sup>

**Timeless Election** — This view attempts to harmonize God’s Sovereign choice in election with His foreknowledge. God elected those individuals who would be saved, yet He also gave them the free will to choose whether or not to believe — a seeming paradox. God’s election is neither based on His foreknowledge of man’s free choice nor is His election exercised independent of it. The seeming paradox is explained by viewing election from God’s vantage point rather than

---

<sup>31</sup> John Piper and Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism.” [www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/doctrines\\_grace/tulip.html](http://www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/doctrines_grace/tulip.html)

<sup>32</sup> An aberrant doctrine known as “Open Theism” promotes the idea that God does not foreknow the future *decisions and acts* of free moral agents, only *possibilities*.”

<sup>33</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Reference Tool For Windows, (Cambridge, MA: Softkey International) 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Vincent, *Word Studies*, Vol. 3, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Vincent, *Word Studies*, Vol. 1, 628. For some helpful, biblical word studies of *foreknowledge*, *predestination*, *election* and their cognates, see Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*: 37-38, 152-195, 464-470.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999), 310

from man's vantage point. Since God is eternal, He exists outside of time. In contrast, man is bound by time. Both conditional and unconditional election presupposes that God made a choice at some point in time. Both Calvinists and Arminians attempt to set up a logical or chronological order of an eternal decree based on the only reality that they know — time. But election is an eternal decree, made by an eternal God who is not bound by time. Therefore it would be unwise to attempt to set up a logical or chronological order of an eternal decree from a time-based reality.

Dr. Norman Geisler explained it like this: “Nothing is future to God. If God is beyond time, then all time is spread before Him in one eternal now. He sees the way a man on the top of the hill sees the whole train at once, while the man in the tunnel below sees only one car going by at a time, noticing neither the one already past nor the one yet to come. God is not standing on one day of the calendar of time, looking back at the days past and forward to the days to come. Rather, He is looking down on the whole calendar, seeing all the days at once (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2).”<sup>37</sup>

Concepts such as “before” and “after” are time words found in the finite, time-based reality of mankind. In the eternal mind of God there is/was no “before” and “after”. To set up a logical or chronological progression such as first God foreknew who would be saved and then He chose based on that foreknowledge, is to subject an eternal God to the time-based reality of finite man. The views of conditional and unconditional election are inadequate explanations because they come from a time-based way of understanding God's choice in election.

Dr. John Walvoord wrote, “The whole process of the divine purpose, election, and foreknowledge are all eternal.... God did not arrive at His decisions after long pondering the difficulties of each plan. In other words, there never was another plan, and thus all aspects of the eternal purpose of God are equally timeless.”<sup>38</sup>

Proponents of this view find scriptural support in First Peter which says that believers are “elect **according to** (*kata*) the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2). The Greek preposition *kata* could also be rendered “in accordance with” or “in harmony with”. It's as if election and foreknowledge are working hand in hand; or working together with each other. Each are equal and neither one has preeminence above the other. Dr. Norman Geisler explains: “God's predetermination is neither based on his foreknowledge of human free choices nor done in spite of it. The Scriptures, for example, declare that we are “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet 1:2). That is to say, there is no chronological or logical priority of election and foreknowledge.... Thus whatever God knows, he determines. And whatever he determines, he knows. More properly, we should speak of God as *knowingly determining* and *determinately knowing* from all eternity everything that happens, including all free acts.”<sup>39</sup> In commenting on 1 Peter 1:2, Dr. John Walvoord said it “teaches not the logical order of election in relation to fore-

---

<sup>37</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 117

<sup>38</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer and John Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 233.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Geisler, *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 70



knowledge by the fact that they are coextensive.”<sup>40</sup>

Dr. Anthony Badger wrote, “As God elects, from His eternal, present tense perspective, He also works out His sovereign purpose within the framework of history on a moment-by-moment basis. His eternal electing activity is applied throughout the progression of history, which He is controlling, and He does so *in accord with* the ability of men to believe (and without coercion) when the gospel message is clearly presented, when we perceive the free offer of eternal life as most valuable and beneficial to us, and when we are fully assured and convinced by His Spirit that what God has promised, He is able to perform (cf. Rom 4:21).”<sup>41</sup>

**Corporate Election** — The first three views dealt with individuals being elected by God. According to the corporate view, God elected a corporate body rather than individual believers. He elected a body of believers who would be saved through the “Elect One” — Jesus Christ. Therefore, all who have trusted Christ by faith are “in Christ” and they are elect in that corporate body — the Church.

Predestination does *not* refer to “God’s predetermining from past ages who should and who should not be saved. The doctrine of predestination concerns the future of believers.”<sup>42</sup> God has predestinated [or pre-appointed]<sup>43</sup> any and all who would believe to all the glorious blessings associated with their eternal salvation. God has “predestinated us [*the church*] unto the adoption of sons...” (Eph. 1:5). And we look forward with joyful anticipation “until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:10-14) when we shall enter fully into that blessed “adoption, that is, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). His purpose for the predestination of all *believers* is our total conformity “to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). It has always been certain that one day “we [*members of the body of Christ*] shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49) because “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him”...(1 Jo. 3:2). God has predestined it so. And therefore, according to His promise, it shall be!

God the Father sovereignly elected God the Son (Mt. 12:18) as well as certain places, individuals and groups — *all for special purposes and/or blessings*.<sup>44</sup> Except for Judas, “a devil” (as one of God’s *elect* apostles, Jn. 6:70) and unbelieving Jews (as members of God’s *elect* people, Is. 44:1) unbelievers are never referred to as elect or non-elect. In relation to eternal salvation, *election* has application only to believers, that is, those “in Christ.” God has “chosen [or elected] us [*the church*] in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him” (Eph. 1:4). We believers were not elected to be put into Christ. We were “elected in Christ.” “It is not that individuals are in the church because they are elect, it is rather

---

<sup>40</sup> Walvoord, *op. cit.*, 233.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony B. Badger, TULIP: A FREE GRACE PERSPECTIVE PART 2: UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* Autumn 2003), 41-42

<sup>42</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 153. Cited in Samuel Fisk, *Election and Predestination*, (Bicester, England: Penfold Book and Bible House, 1997), 40.

<sup>43</sup> See C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*. 165-172.

<sup>44</sup> Some examples of elect places, persons, and groups: Deut. 12:5; 2 Chron. 7:12; 1 Ki. 11:32; Neh. 9:7; Ps. 105:26; 1 Sam. 10:24; 1 Chron. 28:4-5; Acts 22:14; Deut. 18:5; Is. 44:1; Mt. 24:31; Jn. 6:70; 1 Tim. 5:21; and Eph. 1:4.

that they are elect because they are in the church....”<sup>45</sup> The *elect*, the *saints* and the *church* are corporate titles for *believers*. Any and all believers make up an *elect* company of saints — each with all the special privileges associated with their salvation. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers indicating that they had been “from the beginning chosen...to [or for] salvation [with all its blessings and privileges] through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).” God has willed in eternity past that all who by faith receive Christ will be saved and all who reject Him will be lost.

Baptist Pastor Edward Drew put it this way, “God’s predestination is that those who receive the Lord shall be like the Lord Jesus. That is predestination, and nothing else is. God from the beginning, by His foreknowledge, predestinated that every believer should be made like Christ, and nothing else in the Book is predestination. That predestination is that God ordained one to be saved and another to be lost in hell eternally is not within the covers of this Book. God has ordained from the foundation of the world that if you will trust His Son, He Will make you like His Son. That is what we have here.... Those whom God predestinated to be like Christ, He called out — not before He saved them, but when He saved them, He called them out to be like Him... It isn’t that in the past God called you and didn’t call somebody else. God’s predestination is being worked out now.”<sup>46</sup>

**Summary** — There may be other theories on election and predestination that do not quite fit into these four basic views. Some theologians may have a hybrid view of election which contain elements from several views. For instance, C. Gordon Olson wrote, “In a real sense election is both corporate and individual.”<sup>47</sup> While none of these views answers all the questions concerning God’s sovereignty and man’s free will, the Calvinistic teaching of Unconditional Election is by far the most problematic with many aspects being contrary to the actual teaching of Scripture.

The sovereignty of God and the free will of man in relation to salvation has often been the subject of debate by sincere students of God’s Word. Many have attempted to explain the multifaceted elements of election and have come to a wide range of conclusions. Dr. John Walvoord gave some sound advice in considering this complex subject: “While there are serious problems in human comprehension of this doctrine [election], one should submit to divine revelation even if he cannot completely understand it.”<sup>48</sup>

### 3. L — LIMITED ATONEMENT

**God’s love for only the elect** — It is common in Calvinism to speak of God’s love, at least in any redemptive sense, as being only for the elect, not the non-elect. But many think that to say, “God loves the sinner, though He hates his sin” is “a meaningless distinction.”<sup>49</sup> The reasoning seems to be rooted in the Calvinistic view of total depravity. “What is there in a sinner but sin?... To tell the

---

<sup>45</sup> Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 136.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Fisk, *Election and Predestination: Keys to a Clearer Understanding*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 41.

<sup>47</sup> C. Gordon Olson *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002), 189

<sup>48</sup> Walvoord, *op. cit.*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 200.

Christ rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience, as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is that the love of God is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."<sup>50</sup> Another author puts it in these terms: "He [God] cannot love us directly because of our sinfulness, but He can love us in union with Christ, because Christ is the one the Father loves."<sup>51</sup> Some Calvinists even state that God "*is said to hate them [the non-elect], Rom. 9:13.*"<sup>52</sup> Speaking of those whom God "before ordained...to condemnation," another famous Puritan wrote, "God having made some for the day of evil, '...hated them before they were born.'"<sup>53</sup>

Yet Scripture teaches us that God loves the whole world of sinners so much that Jesus came here to die for us while we were yet sinners (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Jesus loved the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:21) — and not just because he "must have been elect." Jesus' compassion for the multitudes, his weeping over Jerusalem, and his request for the Father's forgiveness of the very ones who were torturing him was/is a clear demonstration of His compassionate love for every sinner. Our Lord's repeated appeals to the "*whosoever wills*" are testimony to His love for all people everywhere — even the "*whosoever won'ts*."

**Christ's atonement limited — for only the elect** — For whom did Christ die? Calvinistic logic states: "If God the Father elected some to everlasting life, in other words, then it must follow that Christ died for them only and not for all men without distinction. This, too, is the teaching of the Reformed faith. The atonement is limited — not in its value, but only in those to whom it applies."<sup>54</sup> It is claimed "that, so far as the predetermined purpose of His death is concerned, Christ died for the elect only.... Christ did not die to make possible the salvation of all mankind, but to make certain the salvation of all that the Father had given to Him.... The limited design in the Atonement follows, necessarily, from the eternal choice of the Father of certain ones unto salvation."<sup>55</sup> Berkhof wrote, "Reformed churches... believe in a limited atonement. Christ suffered and died for the purpose of saving only the elect, and that purpose is actually accomplished."<sup>56</sup> To get away from the more negative term some Calvinists prefer using terms such as *particular atonement or particular redemption*.

However, Scripture does not support limited atonement as taught by "five-point Calvinists." John Calvin, commenting on 1 John. 2:2 later in life, was correct when he wrote, "Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and in the goodness of God is offered unto all men without distinction, His blood being shed not for part of the world only, but for the whole human race; for although in the world nothing is found worthy of the favor of God, yet He holds out the propitiation

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Michael S. Horton, Ed., *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 111. Cited in Zane Hodges, "The New Puritanism Part 3: Michael S. Horton: Holy War With Unholy Weapons," (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society [JOTGES]*, Spring 1994), 19.

<sup>52</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 156. Cited in Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 135.

<sup>53</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 115. Cited in Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 209.

<sup>54</sup> [www.opc.org/what\\_is/Reformed\\_Part1.html#P1-2b](http://www.opc.org/what_is/Reformed_Part1.html#P1-2b)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1938, 1962) 107.

to the whole world, since without exception He summons all to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than the door unto hope.”<sup>57</sup> Scripture tells us that God sent the Son into the world that *the world through Him might be saved* (Jn. 3:17). That’s why Jesus is referred to as the *Savior of the world* (Jn. 4:42; 1 Jn. 4:14). God was in Christ *reconciling the world* unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). In dying for the whole world, Christ tasted death *for every man* (Heb. 2:9). He is truly the *Savior of all men*, even though effectually only of believers (1 Tim. 4:10). He is not just the propitiation for the sins of the elect, but He is also the propitiation *for the sins of the whole world* (1 Jn. 2:2). Because of His will for *all men to be saved*, the man, Christ Jesus, *gave Himself a ransom for all* (1 Tim. 2:4-6). When God the Father *laid on Him the iniquity of us ALL*, it has reference to ALL those who like sheep have gone astray (Is. 53:6). And that’s everyone in the world. He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us ALL (Rom. 8:32). That’s why we joyfully and sincerely proclaim to any and every lost sinner, “Christ died for *you*.” That’s why the Gospel is *good news* for everyone!

#### 4. I — IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

**Grace as an enabling, irresistible power**<sup>58</sup> — Calvinistic consistency and logic requires teaching on irresistible grace. Because of [1] total depravity of all humanity, “[2] God the Father elected certain ones to salvation, [3] God the Son died for the elect, and [4] God the Spirit quickens [or regenerates] the elect”<sup>59</sup> sinner with the creative and enabling gift of faith to believe. The Holy Spirit’s life-giving power has reference to the *irresistible, efficacious grace* of Calvinism. “Irresistible grace is grace which cannot be rejected. The conception of the irresistibility of special grace [for only the elect] is closely bound up with... the efficacious nature of that grace.”<sup>60</sup> Obviously irresistible grace is efficacious grace!<sup>61</sup> That’s why it has been referred to as the *effectual call* or “The Efficacious Call of the Spirit.”<sup>62</sup> It is *efficacious* and certain for the regeneration or life-giving, new-birth of each and every elect sinner through enabling him/her to believe the Gospel. So in Reformed theology this *effectual, special, inward CALL* given only to the predestined elect is clearly distinguished from the *noneffectual, general, outward CALL* of the Gospel,

<sup>57</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1906) 778. Cited in H. C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 343. For other Calvin quotes see Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 155-160.

<sup>58</sup> All Roman Catholics, Protestants, and most cultic groups generally acknowledge that salvation and/or justification is by God’s grace which generally and often has reference to “God’s unmerited favor.” And all these generally insist that salvation is by faith in the blood of Christ, through the preaching of the “Gospel” and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And most of these also believe in the efficacious “means of grace,” (including the sacraments) that God uses for the salvation of sinners. In fact, this general concept and belief in some form of “salvation by grace” is the unifying force of the ecumenical movement in our time to reverse what God did during the Great Reformation.

<sup>59</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Hughes, “Grace,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 481.

<sup>61</sup> *Efficacious*, means “having the power to produce a desired effect.” (And the desired effect in this context is the new birth of only the predestined elect through the gift of faith given only to them). See the *Miriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/efficacious>.

<sup>62</sup> David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 1963, 2004), 7.

meant to be given to all people worldwide.

Reformed teachers also make a clear distinction between the *special, inward, supernatural GRACE* for only the predestined elect and a *common, outward, general GRACE* for all people worldwide. The supernatural, irresistible grace granted only to the predestined elect through the effectual call is closely related to the *efficacious grace/graces* granted to the predestined elect through the efficacious *means of grace* which even includes the sacraments, which “become effectual means of salvation... in them that by faith receive them.”<sup>63</sup> As one contemporary Reformed theologian put it, “[The] sacraments are means of grace — and not of grace in general, but of redeeming grace.... [The] preaching and sacraments are God’s means of reaching us... preaching [the Word] and sacrament create and confirm faith.”<sup>64</sup> And those “who are once effectually called... [are] more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”<sup>65</sup> Does “*grace*” in the phrases, “irresistible *grace*, efficacious *grace*, redeeming *grace*, saving *graces* and salvation by *grace*” refer to God’s “unmerited favor?” Of course it does! But most “Christians” also believe that *grace* in these contexts means much more than this. *Grace* is a supernatural, efficacious power given to sinners through various “means” including baptism.

However, Scripture does not teach that efficacious power is given to sinners through baptism or other sacraments.

Reformed teachers generally insist that all “sinners who hear the Gospel are commanded to repent and believe. But this they cannot do, because they are dead in trespasses and sins. Then God, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, creates within His elect the power to do what He commands.... The divine and sovereign act of regeneration effected by the Holy Spirit precedes the human activity of repentance and faith.”<sup>66</sup> Calvinistic thinking has apparently been influenced by Augustinian thinking: “Man in his original state possessed the gift of grace. By this grace Augustine means the supernatural assistance indispensable to all creatures... for the perseverance in good.... Divine grace is not a personal spiritual relation, but a creative energy which generates that freedom of the will which is entirely lost in the natural man and exerts its influence upon man’s will making it capable of doing good.... [G]race consists not so much in the forgiveness of sin... as in the communication of moral powers.”<sup>67</sup>

In connection with the spiritual gifts of *grace* in soteriology (incl. salvation, regeneration, justification and forgiveness, Eph. 2:8-9), it is better to view “*grace*” not as God’s *supernatural power* imparted only to the depraved, predestinated elect, but as *God’s unmerited favor* toward all of us as totally undeserving sinners. With the latter definition the phrase, *irresistible grace*, doesn’t even make sense. It only makes sense when *grace* is defined as a *power*. Any free moral agent, believer or unbeliever, has the ability to willingly accept or reject any of God’s gracious offers.

---

<sup>63</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, #91.

<sup>64</sup> Michael S. Horton, “What Makes Something a Sacrament?” *Evangelium*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (Jan/Feb 2006). Horton is Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California.

<sup>65</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646).

<sup>66</sup> [www.opc.org/what\\_is/Reformed\\_Part1.html#P1-2b](http://www.opc.org/what_is/Reformed_Part1.html#P1-2b)

<sup>67</sup> Klotsche & Mueller, *The History of Christian Doctrine*, (Burlington, IO: Lutheran Literary Board, 1945), 89-90.

God's offer of His *grace*, as His *favor toward undeserving sinners*, can be resisted/rejected by all free moral agents (Acts 7:51).

**Regeneration of the elect preceding faith** — The Calvinistic teaching on total inability requires following Augustine's *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). One has written that "a spiritually dead person cannot will to come [to Christ].... Only those who are quickened (made spiritually alive) by the Holy Spirit ever have that will or that desire. These in Scripture are called the elect."<sup>68</sup> The claim is clearly stated, "Without regeneration it is morally and spiritually impossible for a person to believe in Christ...."<sup>69</sup> Regeneration is thought to precede faith. It has been written: "Personally we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our natural birth.... No corpse can re-animate itself.... But the Spirit does not 'quicken' everybody — why? The usual answer returned to this question is, Because everybody does not trust in Christ. It is supposed that the Holy Spirit quickens only those who believe. But this is to put the cart before the horse. Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it.... Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead... then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything."<sup>70</sup> Some Reformed scholars also state, "The logical priority of regeneration in Reformed theology rests on the doctrine of total depravity or moral inability. Because fallen man is morally unable to incline himself to faith in Christ, regeneration is a logical necessity for faith to occur. If we were to posit that faith precedes regeneration, then we would be assuming that unregenerate people, while still in an unregenerate state, have the moral ability to exercise faith. If the unregenerate can exercise faith, then it follows clearly that they are not fallen to the degree of moral inability, as claimed by classical Augustinian and Reformed theology."<sup>71</sup>

However, Scripture reveals that saving faith is the God-ordained means or channel for regeneration, not the result of regeneration. Regeneration or the new birth takes place when any person believes/trusts in Christ. It is at this time the believer is given a new nature, the indwelling Holy Spirit who quickens the believer with eternal life, the life of Christ. Putting regeneration of spiritual life before faith is putting the cart before the horse. The Word consistently conditions justification and/or eternal life on faith, not vice versa. It's always faith before life, believing before living. As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God (Jn. 1:12). Whoever believes in Him should... have eternal life (Jn. 3:15). You will not come unto Me that you might have life (Jn. 5:40). In other words, both the *willing* and the *coming* to Christ precede the *living*. He who comes to Me, shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst (Jn. 6:35). He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life (Jn. 6:54). He who believes in Me... out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water (Jn. 7:38). We are justified and regenerated BY faith, not TO faith. Neither justification nor regeneration precedes faith, logically or scripturally.

---

<sup>68</sup> Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Faith*, "Man's Totally Helpless Condition" [www.reformed.org/calvinism/trf/part\\_2.html](http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/trf/part_2.html)

<sup>69</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1955), 106.

<sup>70</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*. 72-73.

<sup>71</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), 194. Cited in David R. Anderson, "Regeneration: A Crux Interpretum," (*JOTGES*, Autumn, 2000), 44-45.

**Faith as a special gift only for the elect** — In Calvinism, *only the unsaved elect* are God’s objects of regeneration, which bestows faith as God’s gift to only them, making it possible for only them to believe so that *only* they, the *unsaved elect*, can become the saved elect. To most Calvinists, the teaching of total inability and irresistible grace logically requires teaching that “Faith is God’s gift, and [since] ‘all men have not faith’ (2 Thess. 3:2); therefore, we see that God does not bestow this gift upon all. Upon whom then does He bestow this saving favour? And we answer, upon His own elect... how can those who are ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ believe in Christ? Faith is God’s gift, and apart from this gift none would believe.”<sup>72</sup>

However, the grammar of Ephesians 2:8 indicates that the “gift of God” has reference to the believer’s *salvation* rather than *faith*.<sup>73</sup> It has been stated: “Salvation is the gift of God, bestowed on the principle of grace, and received on the principle of faith.”<sup>74</sup> The principle of faith is the *means* for appropriating salvation, not its *cause*. The believer’s *faith* has nothing to do with *works*. In fact, the two are often placed in an antithetical relationship, especially in Romans and Galatians. “Abraham *believed* God,” and his “*faith* [not works] was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.” That’s why he had no grounds for boasting (Rom. 4:1-9). One’s faith in Christ is no basis for boasting (Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:9) because there is no virtue or merit in faith.

#### 5. P — PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Some have thought that traditional Calvinistic teaching on *Perseverance of the saints* is the same as *eternal security*. However, there are some significant differences between the traditional Calvinistic view and *eternal security*. Calvinism normally teaches that the elect will persevere in faith and good works until the end. However, a typical Calvinistic expression goes like this: “But let us appreciate the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and recognize that we may entertain the faith of our security in Christ only as we persevere in faith and holiness to the end.”<sup>75</sup> Calvin and Reformed theology have no doubt been influenced by Augustine’s views. After Augustine embraced an amillennial view, he repeatedly used Matt. 24:13 “as a proof text for his understanding of perseverance as a requirement for salvation and a proof of election.”<sup>76</sup> A prominent Puritan Calvinist of the past wrote that “our own diligent endeavor is such an *indispensable means* for that end, as that without it, it will not be brought about.... If we are in Christ, God hath given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon Himself, in His covenant, the preservation of them. But yet we may say, with reference unto the means that He hath appointed, when storms

---

<sup>72</sup> Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 50, 59.

<sup>73</sup> See W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. 3, 289; Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies, Ephesians and Colossians*, Vol. 1, (1973), 69; A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4, 525; Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 3, 376.

<sup>74</sup> Sir Robert Anderson, *The Gospel and Its Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978), 54. In a footnote to Eph. 2:8 (p. 54), the author adds, “The gift of God here is salvation by grace through faith. Not the faith itself.” The lengthy footnote of explanation is quite helpful. See also Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism...*, 220-229.

<sup>75</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished & Applied*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 155. One Calvinist within the Reformed tradition suggests “that Murray is perhaps closer to evangelical Arminianism than he ever realized. What is the value of a doctrine of assurance with such a strongly conditional element?” Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>76</sup> D. R. Anderson, “Regeneration: A Crux Interpretum,” 45.

and trials arise, unless we use our diligent endeavors, we cannot be saved.”<sup>77</sup>

These *indispensable means, diligent endeavors* or *good works* and *perseverance in faith and holiness to the end* are thought by many Calvinists to be *non-meritorious conditions* essential for salvation. A prominent contemporary Calvinistic theologian has put it this way: “The question is not whether good works are necessary to salvation, but in what way they are necessary. As the inevitable outworking of saving faith, they are necessary for salvation.... Thus good works may be said to be a condition for obtaining salvation in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith.”<sup>78</sup> It is argued that there is an “elementary difference between non-meritorious ‘requirements,’ ‘conditions,’ ‘necessary obligations,’ ‘indispensable duties,’ and ‘musts,’ as the natural outworking of true faith, in distinction from faith in the Savior *plus meritorious works* as the very basis of salvation.”<sup>79</sup> This is probably what another, who claims to believe in justification by faith alone, means when he states clearly, “There are all sorts of conditions that must be met for someone to be saved. Chief among them is that we must have faith in Christ.”<sup>80</sup> He also writes, “The Reformed view does, in a narrow sense, see obedience as a ‘condition’ (but never the ground) of justification.”<sup>81</sup>

With such legalistic views of perseverance with its faith plus works, it is thus no wonder why so many in the Calvinistic Reformed tradition lack any real assurance of eternal salvation which has led to intense introspection. Even a few theologians within the Calvinistic Reformed tradition have recognized this. Writing as a “Further Developed Calvinist,”<sup>82</sup> one of them indicates that the Arminians cannot “be absolutely sure about the *permanence* of their salvation” due to their “Once saved, maybe lost” doctrine and the Calvinist with his “doubts related to the *genuineness* of Salvation” is often “not quite sure he was even once saved!”<sup>83</sup> As developed in the Post-Reformation era, “Both theologies resulted in legalism, but the Calvinist often bore the added burden of introspection...implicit in many aspects of the Reformed doctrine of grace in late Calvinism.... This is the snag of scholastic [or developed] Calvinism. It leads into the abyss of ever-

---

<sup>77</sup> John Owens, Cited in Philip F. Congdon, “Soteriological Implications of Five-Point Calvinism,” (*JOTGES*, Autumn, 1995), 60, footnote 8.

<sup>78</sup> John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth, A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 210. Cited in P. F. Congdon, *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> J. Gerstner, *Ibid.*, 226. Cited in P. Congdon, *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>80</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 155.

<sup>81</sup> Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 179.

<sup>82</sup> What the author calls “Developed or Scholastic Calvinism” is referred to as “Classic Calvinism” in this paper.

<sup>83</sup> Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance*, 3-4. After years of deep study and ministry, the author became “very dissatisfied with some aspects of the Reformed teaching” which he knew so well. He states, “Our Calvinism did not seem to be the genuine article.” He was asking himself, “Why was it that the Reformed tradition seemed to consist of an ossified legalism, a crippling introspection, and a harshness of spirit that seemed nothing like the Jesus of the Bible?” His answer? There must be an acceptance of Paul’s “radical doctrine of grace” (Galatians and Romans) resulting in a “radical freedom from legalism” through an “emancipation from the Mosaic law.” His “new theology,” also promotes an unlimited atonement, a free-grace salvation (not *Lordship salvation*), eternal security with absolute assurance (not perseverance). Although not a dispensationalist, Eaton attributes faulty hermeneutics to deficiencies in Reformed theology.



increasing introspection.”<sup>84</sup> The fruit is evident. He says, “Is it not a fact of history that the Calvinist has tended to have less assurance of salvation than the Arminian? The Arminian is at least sure of his present salvation. As the result of the high Calvinist doctrine the Calvinist often doubts his present salvation and thus has a less contented frame of mind than his evangelical Arminian friend.”<sup>85</sup> In light of such statements, it is evident that the doctrine of *eternal security* and the Calvinistic view of *perseverance of the saints* should not be equated. They are very different.

The Calvinistic teaching on *perseverance of the saints* undermines the believer’s *eternal security* in Christ and assurance of salvation. How can a believer find any real comfort in this life in an eternal “security” that necessitates our perseverance “in faith and holiness to the end?”<sup>86</sup> If the so-called non-meritorious works that accompany saving faith are absolutely necessary conditions for salvation, is that not tantamount to saying that *salvation is by faith plus works*? Paul taught, that “to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:4-5). Salvation is by faith alone — period! Having been given the gift of eternal life by faith (Jn. 3:16), *we know that we have eternal security in Christ* (1 Jn. 5:13; Rom. 8:28-34). We have already passed from death unto life (Jn. 5:24). If our salvation were conditioned on faith plus non-meritorious works then how is it possible to have any real assurance of salvation? How many such works would be required? And for how long a period are they required? We could not have any real assurance if justification was by faith plus “non-meritorious good works.” But God’s Word (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16) makes it clear that justification is by faith alone, apart from works of the law — including any and all so-called “non-meritorious ‘requirements,’ ‘conditions,’ ‘necessary obligations,’ ‘indispensable duties,’ and ‘musts.’”

#### CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to highlight some of the apparent flaws of Classical five-point Calvinism. Many who identify themselves as Calvinists do not embrace all of the Calvinistic notes in this paper. However, those who embrace the *Calvinism* label need to be aware of its meaning and implications to others. In this paper we have not dealt much with the serious outcomes of Calvinistic teaching. To do so would require another paper. There is considerable discussion on many of the outcomes in sources under “Supplementary Reading” to follow.

To summarize: This paper sets out that God’s Word teaches: 1) that all people, including the unregenerate, are free moral agents with a free will [Mt. 23:37; Jn. 5:40; 8:24; Heb. 11:6]; 2) that, although totally depraved, man has the ability to either accept or reject Christ if/when the conditions implied in Romans 10:14 are met [Rom. 10:14]; 3) that in eternity past God chose us believers (whom He foreknew) in Christ for heavenly purposes and blessings [Eph. 1:1-14; 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:13]; 4) that God pre-appointed us believers (whom He foreknew) for adoption as sons and conformity to the image of Christ [Rom. 8:23, 29; 1 Cor. 15:49; Eph. 1:5, 1:10-14]; 5) that God

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 15, 23, 25.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew 24:13 has reference not to salvation of the believer’s soul, but to believers (esp. Jews) during the great tribulation who endure persecution until their rescue/deliverance at Christ’s coming.

loves, and died for, the whole world of sinners, not just the “elect” sinners [Jn. 3:16-17; 4:42; Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14]; 6) that God’s *grace*, as God’s *favor toward undeserving sinners*, can be either accepted or resisted [Jn. 5:40; Acts 7:51]; 7) that faith logically and scripturally precedes regeneration [Jn. 1:12; 3:15; 5:40; 6:35, 54; 7:38; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:16; 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 3:26]; 8) that faith is not a special gift given only to the elect sinners and withheld from non-elect sinners [Rom. 3:27; 4:1-9; Eph. 2:8-9]; 9) that salvation is the gracious gift of God sincerely offered to whoever will accept Christ [Eph. 2:8]; 10) that whoever will accept God’s offer and provision by putting his trust in Christ has eternal life and deliverance from any condemnation [Jn. 3:16, 18; Rom. 8:1]; and 11) that the believer’s eternal security and assurance rests solely in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone and in the Scriptures alone — not in the believer’s perseverance in good works [Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 5:28; 8:28-34; Gal. 2:16; 1 Jn. 5:13].

### *SUPPLEMENTARY READING*

#### **BOOKS:**

- Anthony Badger, *Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology*, (CreateSpace, 2017).
- Austin Fischer, *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed*, (Cascade Books, 2014).
- C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, (Global Gospel Publishers, 2002).
- Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*, (Multnomah Publishers, 2004)
- Dave Hunt, *What Love is This, Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God*, (Loyal Publishing, Inc., 2002).
- David L. Allen, and Steve W. Lemke, eds. *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2022.
- David L. Allen. *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review*. Broadman & Holman, 2016.
- David L. Allen, and Steve W. Lemke, eds. *Whosoever Will*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- David Dunlap, *Limiting Omnipotence*, (Gospel Folio Press, 2004).
- David R. Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology—Revised Edition*, (Grace Theological Press, 2012).
- George Bryson, *The Dark Side of Calvinism*, (Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004).
- Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, (Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1949)
- Jerry L. Walls, *Does God love Everyone*, (Cascade Books, 2016).
- Jerry L. Walls, *Why I am not a Calvinist*, (InterVarsity Press, 2004).
- John C. Lennox, *Determined to Believe? The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, and Human Responsibility*, (Zondervan, 2018).

- John F. Parkinson, *The Faith of God's Elect*, (Gospel Tract Publications, 1999).
- Ken Wilson, *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*, (Independently Published, 2019).
- Lawrence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, rev. ed. (Vance Publications, 1999).
- Leighton Flowers, *God's Provision for All: A Defense of God's Goodness*, (Trinity Academic Press, 2019).
- Leighton Flowers, *The Potter's Promise: A Biblical Defense of Traditional Soteriology*, (Trinity Academic Press, 2017)
- Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free, A Balanced View of Divine Election*, (Bethany House Publishers, 1999, 2001).
- Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, (Kregel 1967).
- Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History*, (Bethany House Publishers, 1973).
- Ronnie W. Rogers, *Does God Love All Or Some? Comparing Biblical Extensivism and Calvinism's Exclusivism*, (WIPF & Stock, 2019).
- Samuel Fisk, *Calvinistic Paths Retraced*, (Biblical Evangelism Press, 1985).
- Samuel Fisk, *Election & Predestination* (Penfold Book and Bible House, 1997).

#### ARTICLES:

- Anthony B. Badger, "[Tulip: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 1: Total Depravity](#)"
- Anthony B. Badger, "[Tulip: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 2: Unconditional Election](#)"
- Anthony B. Badger, "[Tulip: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 3: Limited Atonement](#)"
- Anthony B. Badger, "[Tulip: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 4: Irresistible Grace](#)"
- Anthony B. Badger, "[Tulip: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 5: Perseverance of the Saints](#)"
- Bob Nyberg, "[The Tangled Roots of Calvinism](#)"
- David R. Anderson, "[The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change From Premillennialism to Amillennialism—Part One](#)"
- David R. Anderson, "[The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change From Premillennialism to Amillennialism—Part Two](#)"
- David R. Anderson, "[Regeneration: A Crux Interpretum](#)"
- Gregory P. Sapaugh, "[Is Faith a Gift? A Study of Ephesians 2:8](#)"
- Lewis S. Chafer, "For Whom Did Christ Die?" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct.—Dec., 1980), pp. 310-326.
- Philip F. Congdon, "[Soteriological Implications of Five-Point Calvinism](#)"

- Robert N. Wilkin, “[A Review of R. C. Sproul’s \*Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology\*](#)”
- Roy L. Aldrich, “The Gift of God,” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, July–Sept., 1965), 258-53.
- Zane C. Hodges, “[Calvinism Ex Cathedra: A Review of John H Gerstner’s \*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism\*](#)”

**OTHER RESOURCES:**

- Soteriology 101— <https://soteriology101.com/>