

An Examination of Calvinism - Introduction

Introductory Comments

Purpose

The purpose of this class is to provide [to the best of my ability¹] a **basic** understanding of the 5 Articles of Calvinism known as TULIP, and to show from Scripture why we at ACC are not persuaded by this system of theology. We will also touch on some other subjects that are foundational to Calvinism [*such as Predestination and Election*].

Caveat

Beliefs within Calvinism fall on a broad spectrum ranging from what is referred to as “hyper-Calvinism” on one extreme to a person who might call himself a “Calminian” [part Calvinist/part Arminian] on the other. Because of this, even some Calvinists would disagree with one another on what truly defines a Calvinist. The scope of this class is not to define things this minutely, but to attempt to stay within what is generally understood as the 5 points of Calvinism. That being said, some might feel like I strayed too far to one side or the other in one or more of my comments or definitions, and that is understandable.

A Common Misconception

If you are not a Calvinist you must be an Arminian. The historic debate is typically centered around Calvinism vs Arminianism, leading you to believe that if you are not one then you must be the other. I think there is a third option - that is ***to be neither*** and simply attempt to be a biblical Christian.

Unfortunate Misnomers

Calvinism is also known as “Reformed Theology” or “The Doctrines of Grace”. These are unfortunate misnomers. The first may leave you with the thought that all reformers held Calvinistic views which is not the case; and the second may lead you to believe that unless you ascribe to Calvinism you do not believe in the grace of God for salvation, again which is false.

Potentially Dangerous Tendencies

1) Within Calvinism there is a strong emphasis on understanding the Creeds, Confessions, Catechisms, and Chronicles of the Reformers. Many times a teacher will cite Jonathan Edwards, or John Calvin, or John Piper or some other theologian as a proof for a specific belief. While there are good things we can gain from the writings of other men, NO writing from ANY man holds the same authority as Scripture. When we make an appeal to a doctrinal position, let us make the appeal to Scripture.

- 2Ti 3:14-17 KJV But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast

¹ I will use quotes from Calvinists from time to time so that what is presented is presented in their words.

been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

2) There is a tendency to elevate the intellect. Again, not bad in and of itself, but we must remember that the things of God are understood by revelation, and a person that may not have a strong intellect can also grasp the things of God. The gaining of knowledge for knowledge sake can often lead to pride, and endless debate.

- 1Co 2:9-10 KJV But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
- Luk 24:44-45 KJV And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,
- 2Co 3:14-16 KJV But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. 15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. 16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

Why This Class?

It is a personal journey to understand

Pro 18:12-13 KJV Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. 13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

- **Concerns of Cessationism**² [Note: Not all Calvinists believe in cessationism] - and the concern that the church in these last days would continue to exercise the spiritual gifts, and acknowledge the offices of the 5-fold ministry and their purpose of bringing the church to maturity
- **“Conversions” to Calvinism** - I am burdened for people who have had a strong biblical foundation, yet laid some parts aside to embrace a different message - I wonder how a person with such a foundation can be so easily moved [all the while

² Cessationism is the belief that the miraculous gifts of the spirit as enumerated in 1 Cor 12 are no longer for today. These as well as the 5-fold ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4 ceased after the last apostle died and the canon of Scripture was written.

realizing that with maturity we may gain new insights into scripture and modify our beliefs].

- **The power of popularity and influence** - With access to information so readily available people without a strong foundation in Scripture can be moved by popular and influential teachers. Many of today's influential preachers, writers, speakers and bloggers are of Calvinistic persuasion. Many of the things taught by these men are biblically sound and solid, and we can learn much from them...However just because a man teaches good things about one topic, it does not necessarily follow that all things he teaches are correct. The only & final arbiter on any topic is the word of God. We must be a people who search the scriptures to see if things being taught are true.

To encourage a “Berean spirit” among us

Act 17:11 KJV These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

To stress the importance of sound doctrine

- 2 Timothy 2:15 NIV Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
- 1Ti 4:13-16 KJV Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. 15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. 16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

To clarify and understand terminology

Predestination and the Sovereignty of God are two tenets of Calvinism - so you might say “I believe in those so I must be a Calvinist”...but defining the terms is so critical. When you understand the implications of Sovereignty and Predestination from a Calvinist point of view you may not buy into it totally.

To give us an orientation for defending the faith

Sometimes our beliefs will be challenged by another person, or by something we read. Sometimes I may need to encourage a younger believer with some aspect of God's word. This class will provide an orientation to Calvinism.

- 2 Ti m. 4:2-3: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.”

A Short History

An Excerpt from John Piper's Blog - Desiring God

The controversy between Arminianism and Calvinism arose in Holland in the early 1600's. The founder of the Arminian party was Jacob Arminius (1560–1609). He studied under the strict Calvinist Theodore Beza at Geneva and became a professor of theology at the University of Leyden in 1603.

Gradually Arminius came to reject certain Calvinist teachings. The controversy spread all over Holland, where the Reformed Church was the overwhelming majority. The Arminians drew up their creed in Five Articles (written by Uytenbogaert), and laid them before the state authorities of Holland in 1610 under the name **Remonstrance**, signed by forty-six ministers. (These Five Articles can be read in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, pp. 545–547.)

The Calvinists responded with a Counter-Remonstrance. But the official Calvinistic response came from the Synod of Dort which was held to consider the Five Articles from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619. There were eighty-four members and eighteen secular commissioners. The Synod wrote what has come to be known as the Canons of Dort. These are still part of the church confession of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. They state the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants. (See Schaff, vol. 3, pp. 581–596).

So the so-called Five Points were not chosen by the Calvinists as a summary of their teaching. They emerged as a response to the Arminians who chose these five points to oppose.

It is more important to give a positive biblical position on the five points than to know the exact form of the original controversy. These five points are still at the heart of biblical theology. They are not unimportant. **Where we stand on these things deeply affects our view of God, man, salvation, the atonement, regeneration, assurance, worship, and missions.**³

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism#History>

The Five Points of Calvinism - (T.U.L.I.P. acronym) and Brief Definitions

Here are a few short definitions of each of the 5 Points mainly to give you a frame of reference. During this class we will delve more deeply into the definitions and the implications of each.

Total Depravity

Man is totally depraved, spiritually dead and blind, and unable to repent. God must initiate the work of repentance. Human beings are so affected by the negative consequences of original sin that they are incapable of being righteous, and are always and unchangeably sinful; human freedom is totally enslaved by sin so we can only choose evil.

Unconditional Election

God's election is based upon His sovereignty. His election is His own decision, and is not based on the foreseen response of anyone's faith and repentance. Since human beings cannot choose for themselves, God by His eternal decree has chosen or elected some to be counted as righteous, without any conditions being placed on that election.

Limited Atonement

When Christ died on the cross, He shed His blood only for those who have been elected and no one else. The effects of the Atonement, by which God forgave sinful humanity, are limited only to those whom He has chosen.

Irresistible Grace

Grace is extended only to the elect. The internal call by God's grace cannot be resisted and always results in conversion. Grace is not extended to the non-elect. The grace that God extends to human beings to effect their election cannot be refused, since it has been decreed by God.

Perseverance of the Saints

God preserves the elect so they persevere to the end, so no chosen person will ever be lost. Since God has decreed the elect, and they cannot resist grace, they are unconditionally and eternally secure in that election.⁴

From "Calvinism Critiqued by a Former Calvinist"

Total Inability / (aka Total Depravity)

Man has sunk so far through the Fall that he is no longer capable of believing the gospel. He can no more repent and believe than a dead man can rise up and walk. This is all the result of the sin of Adam, who communicated this absolute inability, this loss of free will, to all his posterity.

Unconditional Election

⁴ http://www.ccfestus.com/books/taylor_calvinism.htm

God has, before the creation of the world, selected a portion of humanity to be saved. This election is irrespective of any foreseen merits or faith. It is only according to the good pleasure of His will.

Particular Redemption (aka Limited Atonement)

Jesus on Calvary bore the full punishment due his elect, ensuring their final salvation. He did not die for the non-elect, who are excluded and hopelessly reprobated.

Efficacious Grace (aka Irresistible Grace)

God moves upon the helpless sinner before he has a single thought of responding to the good news. Grace renews the spiritually dead will, imparts a new nature and infallibly draws the sinner to Christ. Regeneration, or the new birth, occurs before belief in Christ. Faith, in fact, is a gift imparted to the sinner, who is entirely passive in this act.

Final Perseverance (aka Perseverance of the Saints)

Everyone regenerated by God's grace will persevere and be finally saved. No one who truly begins the life of faith will ever fall away and perish.⁵

From RC Sproul - "Calvinist Theologian"

The Calvinist believes that salvation is wholly an act of God, initiated and worked out and completed by God. How this is achieved can be summarized in the five points, which is traditionally recalled through the acronym T.U.L.I.P.

Total Depravity

This is the doctrine that affirms the whole corruption of man's nature -no one is capable of pleasing God through the efforts of his own natural disposition – all parts of our beings are corrupted by sin, and therefore there is nothing in us which can naturally commend us to God.

Unconditional Election

In order to be saved it is necessary for God to initiate salvation – not according to each one's own merit – those whom He will save is effectual from before the foundation of the world. The Calvinist denies the notion of free-will, as well as any idea that God and man works together in synergy in order to accomplish salvation.

Limited Atonement

Since salvation is based solely on the desire and will of God, and not on the will of man, and since God unconditionally elects those whom He saves, while damning others, the atonement is logically therefore limited only to those whom He has elected.

Irresistible Grace

God's absolute sovereignty means that God's grace cannot be resisted, and that men cannot choose or resist the efficacious grace of God.

Perseverance of the Saints

Those who are born of God will persevere to the end. God's salvation is guaranteed to the end. The Calvinist rejects the doctrine that one can be saved, then fall away from grace, or

⁵ <http://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/openhse/calvinism.html> (Calvinism Critiqued - by a Former Calvinist, Steve Jones)

lose his salvation.

Conclusion: God alone is responsible for every aspect of salvation, from beginning to end, election to glory, and man contributes nothing to it.⁶

The Five Points of Calvinism Form an Integrated Interdependent System

- TULIP Calvinism begins with the idea that mankind is completely sinful and cannot do anything to contribute to his salvation (Total Depravity).
- ***As a result***, we are totally dependent upon God to initiate salvation for us, which He did in eternity past by choosing to save some, without any condition or merit on the part of those whom He chose (Unconditional Election).
- ***In order to accomplish this salvation*** of those whom He had previously chosen, God sent Jesus to die specifically and only for the sins of those whom He had chosen so that they might have eternal life (Limited Atonement).
- ***Those whom God has chosen***, and for whom Christ died, will be irresistibly drawn by God's grace into God's family (Irresistible Grace).
- ***Since God's will cannot be thwarted***, none whom God has chosen, for whom Christ died, and whom were drawn and transformed by God's grace, can ultimately be lost. They will all be glorified. Due to this gift of grace in their life, all who are delivered by God's grace in this fashion will give evidence to it by living a life of perseverance in faith and good works (Perseverance of the Saints).⁷

Boettner explains that:

*These are not isolated and independent doctrines but are so inter-related that they form a simple, harmonious, self-consistent system; and the way they fit together as component parts of a well-ordered whole has won the admiration of thinking men of all creeds. **Prove any one of them false and the whole system must be abandoned.** They are found to dovetail perfectly into the other.*⁸

The debate raises very important issues & questions

- What is the nature of God?
- What is the character of God?
- Is God sovereign, and if so, what does that mean?

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<http://www.christianconversationsnow.com/2011/02/07/r-c-sproul-calvinism/#sthash.173pycOU.dpuf>

⁷ <http://www.tillhecomes.org/summary-of-calvinism/>

⁸ THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM - *Weighed And Found Wanting* (Costa Mesa, CA , The Word for Today), 6

- Does man have a free will, and if so, how does that fit with God’s sovereignty?
- Are people totally and completely evil and unable to choose to repent and be saved?
- Did God pick those who would be saved as well as those who would be damned based on no other condition except for His glory?
- Did Christ die for all of mankind, or only for those he chose for salvation?
- Can man resist the Holy Spirit or do those chosen for salvation have no other choice than to be saved?
- Can you quit being a Christian?

These are the questions we hope to discuss over the next few weeks.

In Closing

Excerpt from Jesus Manifesto

...The truth is, most Calvinists live like Arminians (they hold themselves and others responsible for their actions). And most Arminians pray like Calvinists (they submit their requests to the will of God) . . .The Christ who is truly (but only partially) present in our doctrine and experience is the true substance of the Christian faith. As for us, we will always “know in part” until we meet Him “face to face.”

Concerning the reality of Christ Himself, all the fullness of God dwells within Him. It is for this reason that every theological system breaks down somewhere. Every systematic theology, no matter how coherent or logical, eventually meets some passage of Scripture or passage of life that refuses to fit into it. Such passages have to be bent, twisted, and forced to fit the system.

Why is this? It’s because Christ is too immense, to imponderable, and too alive to be tied into any immovable system of thought constructed by finite humans....Thus, He will always break out...Jesus Christ is too alive to be caged in any human system. As Paul exclaimed in holy exasperation, “How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

...So, Christianity is not an allegiance to a complex doctrinal or ethical system, but a passionate love for a way of living in the world that’s rooted in living by Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Our theologies, doctrines, and subjective experiences are designed to flow organically from our loving relationship to Christ, but they are never to substitute for it.

...Calvinism and Arminianism are imperfect theological systems, both of which have their strengths. As a model for prayer and devotion, Calvinism excels. As a model for taking responsibility in life, Arminianism excels. ...You can go through your Bible carefully and find biblical texts that better fit the Calvinist model, while others have to nearly be bent to fit it. The same with Arminianism. Some texts refuse to fit neatly into its mold.

Why is this? Because the Bible wasn’t written to Western minds shaped by Aristotelian logic. And so it’s difficult for us (Westerners) to embrace paradox. Yet Scripture is full of paradox, and Jesus Himself is the Ultimate and Absolute Paradox. He is God. He is Man. He is Divine and Human. From that paradox flows all others. Since Christ is Truth incarnate, spiritual truth contains the element of paradox.⁹

May we seek to be identified by our love

⁹ Jesus Manifesto, Leonard Sweet & Frank Viola HarperCollins Christian Publishing

- John 13:35 KJV By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

May we seek to be known as Christians not some other name

- Act_11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

May our study of Scripture lead us closer to Jesus

- John 5:39-40 KJV Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. (40) And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.