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Calvinism and Missions

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The Development of Calvinism and its Impact on World Missions

Many Christians today think or openly declare that theology is not important or needed, or worse, believe that theology kills the spirit of the church. It is said that all we need to do is to love or worship Jesus. However, most of the significant problems in the church today are a result of the doctrinal disappearance from the pulpit and the pews, and is replaced by what "feels good" or what we feel is needed. However, our worldview, perspective of God and inner fortitude are built on our theology, not our feelings. Everyone has a theology. The question is: does our theology derive from the Scriptures, our own imagination or philosophy.

Calvinism is primarily a discussion on the nature of God and His salvation offer to mankind. Of all the topics of the world, these two topics beg to be understood properly by all men. A mistake here can be more than fatal.

When a person says he is a Calvinist, it can have a variety of meanings. "Popular" Calvinism would mean that the person believes in eternal security (a once-saved-always-saved faith) as opposed to an Arminian who believes a saved person can lose his salvation. Then there is the "Broad-based"[1] Calvinism which goes a little deeper and can articulate the supposed meanings of TULIP, usually being able to state how many of the 5 points of Calvinism they believe. It is broad-based because the interpretations of the points of Calvinism are stretched to accommodate different theologies or interpretations. For example, Total Depravity is seen as the lostness of man, rather than the total inability of man to respond to the Gospel or to seek God; Perseverance of the Saints is interpreted as Preservation or Security of the Saints. This enables a person to declare that he is a 2-point or 3-point Calvinist, without losing his credibility as a non-Calvinist, or an Arminianist. However, these points teach a doctrine quite different than "broad-based" Calvinists want to believe. Charles Hodge gives this summary introduction of Calvinism:

> Such is the great scheme of doctrine known in history as the Pauline, Augustinian, or Calvinistic, taught, as we believe, in the Scriptures, developed by Augustine, formally sanctioned by the Latin Church, adhered to by the witnesses of the truth during the Middle Ages, repudiated by the Church of Rome in the Council of Trent, revived in that Church by the Jansenists, adopted by all the Reformers, incorporated in the creeds of the Protestant Churches of Switzerland, of the Palatinate, of France, Holland, England, and Scotland, and unfolded in the Standards framed by the Westminster Assembly, the common representative of Presbyterians in Europe and America.
>
> It is a historical fact that this scheme of doctrine has been the moving power in the Church; that largely to it are to be referred the intellectual vigor and spiritual life of the heroes and confessors who have been raised up in the course of ages; and that it has been the fruitful source of good works, of civil and religious liberty, and of human progress (Hodge, 1992, p. 333).

First we'll look at the historical background of Calvinism and Arminianism and how they developed into modern movements; secondly, we will define the meanings of the terms used in Calvinism with a Scriptural critique; thirdly, we will look at the wide range of variant views of Calvinism; and fourthly, we'll describe the impact on contemporary movements and missions.

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[1] Other terms might be "Moderate" (except this has a "liberal" connotation in Southern Baptist circles) or "Neo-Calvinist," "Modified Calvinists," or "Popular" (though I have taken this term to mean the most used and least understanding group of Calvinist - they usually have no idea what TULIP means).

Historical background

Augustine and Pelagius

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was Bishop of Hippo on the coast of Algeria. He was a philosopher and theologian, who formulated much of the Roman Catholic doctrines, especially the concept of the Catholic Church as the *City of God* and a deterministic theology. Augustine became a Manichaean before becoming a Christian. This was a dualistic Gnostic religion that may have affected some of Augustine's later theology: i.e., the separation of groups into elect, hearers and sinners, and the ascetic concepts against the flesh and sexual activity. His view on original sin against the Pelagians'[2] concept of man's free choice was sharply contested by the Eastern Church, such that Augustine's views were the key theological division between the Eastern and Western Catholic Church.

Pelagianism was reborn as Humanism in the Renaissance and influenced Arminianism and modern liberalism. Though condemned by the Early Church, its seminal thoughts have continued. Semi-Pelagianism accepted the depravity of man from Adam's Fall, but man retained his free will as an image bearer of his Creator. Sinners can only come to God as God's grace works in their lives, but that grace is not always effective. Man's will exercised in faith must cooperate with God's grace to bring about salvation.

The dispute rages in theological circles. The Augustinian/Calvinistic side claiming that the Pelagian views are seen in modern day Evangelicalism which denounces Humanism as the enemy of Christianity, but holds to a "Humanistic" view of man's free will.

Roman Catholic doctrinal distinctives that came from Augustine's writings include the following:

- Suppressed sexuality within marriage, limiting sexual intercourse to the minimum necessary for having children
- Denial of salvation to anyone not in the Catholic Church
- Criminalization and state suppression of those not in the Catholic Church
- Persecution to compel men to join the Catholic Church
- Eternal damnation of unbaptized infants
- Baptismal regeneration, limiting salvation to those baptized in the Catholic Church
- Veneration of relics
- Sinlessness and perpetual virginity of Mary
- Sacerdotalism (attribution of supernatural powers to the priesthood)
- Sacramentalism (religious rites believed to be channels of grace, held to be necessary for salvation) (Bentley-Taylor:1998, p. 232)

Augustine's integration of Geek philosophy into Christianity would mold the thinking of the Western Church for the next thousand years until Thomas Aquinas would take it to another level. His influence on Luther, Calvin and the Protestant world has no peer.

[2] Pelagius believed that original sin did not taint human nature and that the will of man can still choose good or evil without divine aid. Adam's sin was a bad example, but there was no imputed sin to his descendents. Jesus was a "good example" as Adam was a bad example. Thus, man has full control and consequently full responsibility for his own salvation and his own sins. Since man must become good enough for salvation, thee is no redemptive quality ascribed to Jesus' crucifixion.

Reformation and the development of Calvinism

Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD) was a German Augustinian monk, theologian and university professor who became a church reformer and founder of a Protestant Church that took his name. Two factors motivated Luther's need for reformation: (1) his study in the book of Romans for a preaching series led him to the conviction that God's righteousness was granted freely by faith and (2) the corruption that resulted from the sale of indulgences to raise money for St Peter's Basillica in Rome.

The Roman Church taught faith alone could not justify a person, but charity and good works together were necessary to justify the sinner. These good works could be obtained by donating money to the Church. The offense of the Dominican priest Johann Tetzel who was commissioned to raise funds for the Basillica , said, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" provoked Luther to write a formal protest in the form of 95 Theses. These he boldly nailed to the church door in Wittenberg. Within a few months in 1517 Luther's 95 Theses had been reproduced by the newly invented printing press and distributed throughout Europe. The Protestant Reformation was set aflame.

Luther had come to discover that the biblical reference to the righteousness of God, though it was God's standard of acceptance and sinful man could not obtain to its purity, was not a harsh, punishing wrath awaiting the sinner. Rather, it was the gracious offer of God's own righteousness as something that God freely gives an undeserving sinner, if he will receive it as a gift through faith without any dependence on personal merit. This truth would forever change Christianity.

Martin Luther made his great discovery that justification was by faith alone. Whereas Augustine had held that justification was a process ongoing in the life of the believer, Luther realized that justification was an event rather than a process. For Luther the sinner was declared righteous by God at the moment of faith in Christ. The Council of Trent, called in 1545, reaffirmed the Augustinian idea that justification was a process of renewal within human nature, an ongoing regeneration. "For Luther, the core truth of the gospel was the reality of personal salvation as a present and secure possession from the moment of believing. The believer's status before God had changed from being 'condemned' to being 'justified.' This justification was entirely on the ground of grace and was appropriated by faith, without the mediation of church or sacraments. Luther went on to challenge the whole validity of sacramental theology" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 46).

John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) was a French Protestant theologian who studied law graduating in 1532 and is considered a second generation reformer though the formal systematization of his beliefs, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, was first published in Basel in 1536, barely 20 years after Luther's 95 Theses were nailed on the church door in Wittenberg. "The gospel axiom for Luther was that ***justification*** was by grace; the dominant theme for later Reformers was that ***election*** was by grace. This change in emphasis began with John Calvin of Geneva" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 47).

Calvin taught that it was the doctrine of predestination which explained why some respond to the gospel and others do not. Only God could be the cause of human response. However, the Bible does not give the answer to that question. We should acknowledge that the issue takes us beyond what the Scriptures reveal and certainly far beyond the field of human enquiry. "We cannot explain why certain individuals believe while others do not, nor do we need to. We must leave the answer to God. Salvation is of the Lord, and there are depths which we cannot fathom.

Calvin was wrong to teach that it was the function of the doctrine of predestination to explain the mystery of men's differing responses. ... Calvin's views on predestination and election were Augustinian rather than Scriptural" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 48).

Examples of Calvin's views which were largely influenced by Augustine are:

- Absolute double predestination of all men from eternity (some to salvation and all others to reprobation and damnation).
- Election, taken to mean the selection of sinners for salvation or perdition
- Grace, taken to mean an irresistible gift to the elect sinner of regeneration then faith.
- Amillennialism, a spiritualization/alegorization and denial of the literal earthly millennial reign of Christ on His second coming.

Infant baptism and Covenant Theology

Perhaps one of the major contributors to the creation of a nominal Christianity was the concept of the Covenant. Because of the failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church and equating circumcision with baptism, Calvin interpreted the OT covenant with Israel to be continued with the Church. Thus God made a covenant or promise to new believers that their families would all be saved, taking Acts 16:31 as a key promise "you shall be saved, and your family." For Calvin this was the foundational doctrine for infant baptism, and thus his major argument against the Anabaptists.[3] Children are baptized at birth to become part of the Covenant, just as the Jews circumcised their males to become part of the Covenant people. However, Calvin taught that this promise was an obligation for God to bring children of believers to salvation as well as the parents.

Calvin deduced that since the Covenant is essentially the same in the Old and New Testaments, if followed, the children of the NT as well as those in the OT should receive the sacrament that marks their acceptance into that covenant. For Calvin, the exception of the rule is the conversion of an unreached person, as the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost or the Ethiopian. These were considered as exceptional as proselytes to Judaism in the OT. John Parkinson quotes Calvin's *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines* (p. 46),

> "But we must now note that when a man is received of God into the fellowship of the faithful, the promise of salvation which is given to him is not for him alone but also for his children. For it is said to him: 'I am thy God, and the God of thy children after thee' (Gen 17:7). Therefore the man who has not been received into the covenant of God from his childhood is as a stranger to the church until such time as he is led into faith and repentance by the doctrine of salvation. But at that time his posterity is also made part of the family of the church. And for this reason, infants of believers are baptized by virtue of this covenant made with the fathers in their name and to their benefit" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 49).

Calvin followed Augustine in his failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church, between circumcision and baptism. The result of this teaching has left countless people presuming they are saved because they were told they were already part of the covenant promise made to some ancestor who supposedly accepted Christ and joined the church. Many countries of the world

[3] Anabaptist, or "re-baptizers," believed that baptism is to be practiced only after a person becomes a believer. Since everyone at that time had been sprinkled or poured soon after birth, everyone was already "baptized" once.

have large "Christian" populations, but they generally have little or no understanding of the Gospel today.

Early Development of Calvinism

Calvin was involved in the French Protestant movement until threatened by persecution, when he fled to Geneva, Switzerland. The enthusiasm for this intellectual approach to explaining the gospel led to an institute in Geneva which also served as a refuge for persecuted reformists from France, England, Italy, Scotland, etc. Once trained in the deductive syllogistic logical approach to explain Calvinism, which was hard to defeat, graduates were eager to return to their countries to lead the Calvinistic movements and plant churches. The appeal to reason found a good response against the mystical works-based traditional religion of Catholicism.

When Calvin died in 1564 his successor as director of the Genevan Academy was Theodore Beza (1519-1605), a French Protestant theologian and Greek professor. "It was Beza who was responsible for repositioning predestination at the center of the theological system later to become known as Calvinism. Of particular interest is the new methodology which Beza adopted to formulate and defend his system...For their new methodology they turned, not to the Scriptures, but to Aristotle" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 50).

Alister McGrath in *A Life of John Calvin*, described the four characteristics of Calvin's new approach: "First, Christian theology is presented as a rationally coherent and defensible system, derived from syllogistic deductions based upon known axioms. Second, human reason is assigned a major role in the exploration and defense of Christian theology. Third, theology is understood to be grounded upon Aristotelian philosophy, and particularly Aristotelian insights into the nature of method; later Reformed writers are better described as philosophical, rather than biblical theologians. Fourth, theology is concerned with metaphysical and speculative questions, especially relating to the nature of God, his will for humanity and creation, and above all the doctrine of predestination" (McGrath, 1993, p. 213). This adoption of deductive logic and chain reasoning resulted in conclusions which went beyond what the Scriptures actually say.

Early Missions of Calvinists

Some have objected to Calvin's understanding of missions by claiming that Calvin believed that the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) was binding only on the first century apostles, making missions unnecessary for future generations (Tucker, 1983, p. 67). J. Van den Berg explained this viewpoint from the historical debate that Calvin was involved in against the Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession. He wanted to show that the Apostolate terminated with the twelve apostles, but not missionary activity (Van den Berg, 1950, p. 178).

Ruth Tucker writes in her history of Christian missions that the doctrine of predestination taught by Calvinists "made missions extraneous if God had already chosen those he would save." However, according to Calvin, this objection forgets the doctrine of the preached word. Calvin insisted that God uses the preaching of the gospel by men to bring people to faith (Tucker, 1983, p. 67). One area where Calvinistic missions survived was in Hungary. Charles Edwards described the persecution against the Calvinistic reformation through the seventeenth century because of the Counter Reformation, but they survived until today 2/3 of the evangelical churches are Calvinistic in origin (Edwards, 1936, p. 47).

In 1544, Calvin sent the first Reformed missionary to the Netherlands. Pierre Brully worked to establish a Reformed church there, but was martyred after only three months. Lutherans and Anabaptists had seen some converts in the 1520's and 30's, but the Calvinists carried the day, possibly because of the Calvinistic form of church government and discipline (Laman, 1989, p. 59). In an era of church-state politics much of the "mission work" was to gain the political power to have the authority for control within and power without to avoid retribution from Catholicism. The translation of the Bible by the Protestants into various national languages was a key factor, because the Catholic Church continued to insist on everything in the Church being in Latin. Gordon Laman in the Reform Review described the early work of Hadrianus Saravia (1513-1613) who wrote a Reformed perspective on missiology. He argued against the prevalent concept that the Great Commission had ended with the Apostles. According to Laman, missionaries were sent to India from the Netherlands nearly two hundred years before Carey wrote his Enquiry in 1792, though we have little evidence of these missionaries. Saravia's work also influenced the early Puritans in America such as John Eliot, who ministered to the American Indians in New England during the seventeenth century (Laman, 1989, pp. 62-63).

Kenneth Scott Latourette describes John à Lasco (Jan Laski) who returned to Poland in 1557, where he spent the last three to four years of his life "in an evangelical campaign to create a proper evangelical Church in Poland. Lasco was the leading reformer in Poland. He was originally a priest and friend of Erasmus before undertaking the task of furthering the Reformation in several countries, including England and Germany. After his return, he busied himself "preaching, holding synods, stimulating the translation of the Bible into Polish, and seeking to bring the varieties of Protestantism into one ecclesiastical structure." (Latourette, 1975, pp. 793-794)

Much is made of the early Calvinistic mission to South America, but it was a brief, ill planned, though noble attempt at world missions. Protestants were greatly hindered in any attempt to take the gospel overseas. Prior to 1588 (when the Spanish Armada was defeated) the Spanish and the Portuguese (Catholic countries) controlled the sea-lanes (Edwards, 1936, p. 47). A group of French Huguenots[4] (the Protestant Reformed Church of France) on November 10, 1555, set sail and after four months, they landed in Rio de Janeiro. After the French admiral Villegagnon arrival in Brazil, he sent word back to Coligny asking for reinforcements for protection against the Portuguese and for ministers to evangelize the Tupinamba Indians. Coligny was all too happy to oblige his request. He wrote Calvin about the matter, and according to Baez-Camargo, Calvin "saw a wonderful door opening here for the extension of the Geneva Church, and so he took steps at once to organize a missionary force." Two pastors and eleven laymen volunteered for the mission. They left Geneva in September 1556 and landed in Fort Coligny (in Rio de Janeiro) in March 1557 (Beaver, 1967, p. 14).

The Pope had divided the New World between Spanish and the Portuguese. The French defied the Pope in this matter and sent out ships to the New World themselves. Since these countries were Catholic, they did not permit Protestant missionaries to sail overseas with the gospel (Beaver, 1967, p. 15).

[4] "Huguenot" was probably a nickname from a German word meaning "Confederate." It was a political title for the attempt to get the city-state of Geneva aligned with the Swiss Confederation. In France, the aristocratic Calvinists attempted to remove the powers that be to align with the Swiss. With such political and religious differences combined eventually it provoked two centuries of persecution.

After less than one year in Brazil, in January 1558, the missionaries set sail to return home. Yet the ship began to leak, so five of the Geneva men decided to return to the mission. Admiral Villegagnon initially welcomed them back, but then grew suspicious. He demanded a statement of faith from the Genevan Calvinists. When he received the statement, he had three out of the five men strangled and thrown into the ocean (the other two were spared because Villegagnon was in need of a tailor and a cutler). Villegagnon later returned to France for reinforcements, and in 1560, the Portuguese attacked and destroyed the fort, and the French colony was ended (Beaver, 1967, p. 20). An island near the Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is called Villegagnon Island.

The question is raised as to the motives of these early "missionary" efforts. Were they genuinely seeking to evangelized the lost or intellectually convincing people of the new thought of Calvinism. "The Register of the Company of Pastors mentions 88 men who were sent from Geneva between 1555 and 1562…It has been determined from other sources that no less than 142 missionaries were sent from Geneva (a city of 20,000) in 1561 alone." (Hughes, 1966, p. 20) Mostly they were refugees that had fled persecution when they came to Geneva. Then after receiving training in Calvinism in the Geneva Institute, they wanted to return with this teaching, in spite of the risks involved.

After the first Baptist churches began to spread from the Netherlands back to England and to the New Colonies, conflicts with the Reformed Calvinists were inevitable. "The *classical* Calvinism of the 16th century advocated doctrines unacceptable to Baptists: the baptism of infants, sacraments as means of grace and an amillennial view of the end of the world, among other doctrines. Yarnell said in *Calvinism: A Cause for Rejoicing, a Cause for Concern* the 16th-century Calvinism would reject Baptist emphasis on adult baptism and being born again, and would be uncomfortable with evangelicals talking about a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ (Dockery, 2007). From the beginning there was a different definition of missionary evangelism.

First of all, there is the danger of what Calvinism can do to evangelism and missions. Calvinism has undercut missionary and evangelistic efforts, especially hyper-Calvinism, which is merely the logical implication of the theology. Ultimately it was challenged and overcome in the late eighteenth century by Andrew Fuller, William Carey, John Suttcliffe and others. These men and their colleagues rejected what they called "false Calvinism" and returned to the evangelical Calvinism (what they called "true or strict Calvinism") of their Particular Baptist forefathers. This revitalized Reformed theology gave birth to the modern missionary movement with the formation of the Particular Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 (Ascol, 2007).

Historically, back in England about 1790, God had laid it on the heart of a young shoe cobbler, to try to fulfill The Great Commission. His name, of course was William Carey. And William Carey proposed at a pastoral associational meeting that they ought to take the gospel to the heathen. He wanted go to India. And a prominent Baptists named John Rylands, Sr., said to him, "Young man you are just a youthful enthusiast. Sit down. If God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without you and me."

John Rylands was a Calvinist, and this was mainline traditional Calvinism as it existed in Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed, and infiltrated somewhat throughout Baptist churches of late 18th century Europe. Roy Fish wrote, "The whole modern missionary movement could have been snuffed out had Carey listened to John Rylands. But Carey refused to sit down, for he realized that God would not convert the heathen without you and me, that they have to hear the gospel, and that somebody has to take the message to them" (Fish, 1997).

Arminianism and Wesley

As often happens in Church History, extreme views provoke extreme responses. Beza's renewal of the Augustinian views on predestination and limited atonement caused divisions within Calvinism. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) opposed the Bezanian approach to theology. The Calvinist stated that God arbitrarily elected certain sinners to salvation, foreknowing them in the sense of irresistibly foreordaining their repentance and faith. Arminius took issue with this view declaring that God foresaw who would freely repent and believe and so, consequently elected them.

Both Calvinists and Arminians equated election with salvation: Calvinists saw election to salvation as unconditional and entirely God's sovereign choice; while the Arminian saw God's election to salvation as conditional on the individual's choice. Election, so critical to the understanding of both theological soteriology systems, was misunderstood since election has an entirely different objective in Scripture, as will be shown later.

Arminius' criticism of Calvinism was chiefly on the basis of hermeneutics, the Calvinistic method of interpreting the Bible was defective in that it was primarily a deductive methodology based on syllogisms.

> "For Arminius, the Bezan approach to theology via predestination is the result of the application of a deductive and synthetic method; the correct theological method, he argues, is inductive and analytic...Under the influence of Beza, Aristotelian syllogistic logic became an essential component of the curriculum of the Genevan Academy" (McGrath, 1993, p. 216)

Unfortunately, Arminius exaggerated his concept of the free will of man resulting in at least two major fallacies: first, he declared that man's free will is not affected by Adam's sin, therefore he is free to chose Christ entirely on his own volition or under the prevenient grace working to draw the sinner to Christ; second, this free will to choose to have Christ in one's life, continues to be free to choose to abandon Christ after salvation, thus resulting in the loss of one's salvation.

The controversy became so great that the Synod of Dort was convened in 1618-1619 to reconcile the differences. The final decision was a confirmation of the Calvinist position over the Remonstrants, the followers of Arminius, who were never even allowed to take their seats in the Synod! The defense of Calvinism was five areas of argumentation or axioms, that would become known as the "doctrines of grace," Augustinian sovereignty of God or the TULIP:

Total depravity
Unconditional election
Limited atonement
Irresistible grace
Perseverance of the saints

Following the Synod of Dort the five-point Calvinism defined the *Canons of Dort*, and became the watershed of orthodoxy. Anything less or different was suspect of heresy. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) became the authoritative doctrine for Presbyterians, Baptists and Anglicans.[5]

The Augustinian theology of God's decrees became the core of the Protestant Reformation as noted in the Westminster Confession, chapter 3, paragraphs III and IV, "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life,

[5] The *Second London Confession* (1677) only differed from the *Westminster Confession* in ecclesiology.

and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus designated, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished."

General, Regular/Particular Baptists

A few definitions of distinct movements within the overall Baptist movement are largely defined by their view of Calvinism.

The **General Baptists** believe in a *general* atonement. This view holds that the death of Christ made salvation available to anyone who voluntarily exercised faith in Christ. Many of these churches were Arminian in theology and taught that a person could fall from grace. Some of the earliest English Baptists under Thomas Helwys and John Smyth followed this theology. After fleeing persecution to the Netherlands in 1607 they encountered some Anabaptists who convinced them of believer's baptism, so in 1609 they formed the first Baptist church. In 1611 Helwys and Smyth led a small group back to England to start the first General Baptist church in England. Some of these churches moved towards liberalism and Unitarianism. The Great Awakening of the mid-18th century brought revival to the General Baptists, while most of the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists were skeptical of Wesley's Arminianism. In the US the General Baptists were absorbed into the Regular Baptists, with a few remnants forming the Free Will Baptists in North Carolina.

The **Regular Baptists** or **Particular Baptists** united in the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1707. By 1932 the liberal influence in many major Baptist denominational groups became so aggressive that the fundamentalist groups split off to form the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC). This was to be an Association or fellowship of churches instead of a denomination to maintain the autonomy of the local churches. During the Great Awakening of the mid-1700s a number of churches split off from their denominations and formed the **Separate Baptists** Churches. These were connected to the preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and George Whitfield (1714-1770). The enthusiasm and influx of new converts in these churches left many of the Calvinists skeptical and critical of the revivals. The Separate Baptists practiced nine ordinances[6] instead of two ordinances practiced normally by Baptists. These groups joined around 1800 to form the **Union Baptists** which later became the **Southern Baptists** and **American Baptists**. The differences were mostly in questions of autonomy, practices of ordinances, and sometimes theological issues like Calvinism. However, many held to a "moderate" Calvinism claiming 3-points (of TULIP), but mostly they held to the perceived Calvinistic focus on eternal security.

General descriptions

Similarities between the different views

Some of the similarities of Calvinism and Arminianism, though on opposite poles of the spectrum, are both in error in regard to Scriptural truth. First, neither school discerns any

[6] These included baptism, the Lord's Supper, love feasts, laying on of hands, washing feet, anointing the sick, the right hand of fellowship, kiss of charity, and dedicating children. Though most of these are regular practices of Baptist churches they are not considered ordinances.

difference between the election of Israel as God's earthly people, and the election of the church as God's heavenly people. Second, both schools miss the essential point that the election of Scripture has nothing to do with the choice of individual sinners for salvation, but has to do exclusively with the choice of the saints for heavenly blessings (Parkinson, 1999, p. 52).

The Remonstrant, the supporters of Arminius, all believed in the death of Christ as sufficient payment for the sins of all mankind. For the Remonstrant each individual had the choice of saying 'yes' or 'no' to God's call; but for the Calvinist, it was God who said 'yes' or 'no' to each individual, and Christ only died for those to whom He said, "yes."

Philosophical or logical implications

Scholasticism[7] was introduced in the founding of the medieval Catholicism by Augustine, but Thomas Aquinas became the chief designer of the training of Catholic priesthood through the 20th century. During the 17th century this philosophical methodogy was adapted into the Protestant scholasticism to produce systematic theologies. "Protestant theologians, especially Calvinists, could use scholastic methods to inquire beyond biblical texts into the intricacies and implications of Protestant theology, especially when divine election and the will of God were considered" (from the entry for 'Scholasticism, Protestant' in *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*) (*Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1986).

Doctrinal Distinctives

Deductive or Inductive hermeneutics

The typical approach to explaining and defending the doctrines of Augustinian Calvinism became the use of syllogisms, which are utilized to silence any opposition, even though the final result may or may not agree with the Scripture. The central figure of Aristotelian logic was the syllogism, "a discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so." The strength of the argument is by "virtue of the fact that it would not be possible to assert the premises and to deny the conclusion without contradicting oneself" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "syllogism"). Typically a syllogism consists of three propositions, a major premise and a minor premise followed by the conclusion of an **argument**:

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore Socrates is mortal.

If the premises in a syllogism are true and if its form, or pattern, is valid, then the conclusion of the syllogism is and must be true. However, not all possible combinations of such

[7] A method and a system which sought to reconcile Christian theology, the Church Fathers with Greek philosophy of Aristotle. The methods of deductive reasoning and *a priori* methods were used to build systems of though and theology. Disagreements are examined through a series of dialectics, unifying two sides of an argument through philological analysis (examination of word meaning) and logical analysis (applying the rules of logic), to come to an indisputable conclusion.

premises in this structure produce valid syllogisms. The question arises, Is this a valid tool for hermeneutics for the interpretation of Biblical exegesis? The following is a Roman Catholic syllogistic logic:

Mary is the mother of Jesus.
Jesus is God.
Therefore, Mary is the mother of God.

Notice that both premises can be valid, but the conclusion results in a false notion or heresy. This should warn us that deductive syllogism is NOT an appropriate tool for discerning and determining biblical doctrine. By far the correct approach should always be inductively discerning what the Scriptures say about anything, then formulating the doctrine that clearly encompasses these clearly defined truths as Johnson declares in his *Expository Hermeneutics*:

> "Inductive study sets a necessary goal because we want to know the Bible. An inductive process of learning is one in which we use the particulars of a passage to draw out a general meaning. This is the opposite of a deductive process, in which we begin with a premise or a universal statement and follow it to its logical conclusions according to the evidence offered in the text" (Johnson, 1990, p. 18).

In summary, the deductive approach brings some general assumptions or presuppositions to the study of the Scriptures, not so much to see if they are true, but to prove them to be true, which logic dictates they must be. These assumptions become the governing principles in deciding the meanings of particulars of scriptures or doctrines. This is often done through a series of Aristotelian syllogisms. Much preferred is the inductive method which seeks to examine all the references on a specific theme or subject then come to the general teaching, solely on the basis of what the Bible says about the specifics. These two approaches to hermeneutics have led to the major differences within Christianity.

Sovereign grace and God's decrees

As stated, five-point Calvinism was developed out of deductive logic and Aristotelian syllogisms. It is a tight argument to crack when attempting to analyze it logically. The master premise is the Augustinian teaching on God's immutable decrees or God's sovereignty. The argument is this: According to Augustine, God had unchangeably decreed from eternity all human history, events, choices and destinies. Since God is sovereign, any act or choice, which is independent of God, would compromise His sovereignty. Thus, when a sinner rejects the gospel, it is not because the sinner has refused the grace of God, but because God has refused the sinner. Otherwise, according to Augustine, God would not be sovereign.[8]

> "So what general principle does Beza use as a logical starting point? The answer is that he bases his system on the divine decrees of election - that is, the divine decision to elect certain people to salvation and others to damnation. All the remainder of theology is concerned with the exploration of the consequences of these decisions. The doctrine of predestination thus assumes the status of a controlling principle" (McGrath, 1994, p. 398).

[8] Quite disturbing is the similarity of the Augustinian concept of absolute sovereignty with the Muslim concept of Allah's absolute predestination as expressed in the song, "Whatever will be, will be." Thus, "whatever will be" is what happens and is God's will since He determined it would happen and then made it happen.

The decrees of divine election to salvation are said to be immutable. Lewis Sperry Chafer claims that election "cannot change in the history of the human race. God does not adjust Himself to the will of man, and in fact He knew all that men would do even before He created him" (Chafer, 1949, p. 10).

Can we say that Scriptures make such a blanket statement? Did Jonah believe in the immutable decrees of God, or was his main problem the fact that God might change or postpone his anger against Nineveh? (Jonah 3:10). The fact that God would change and be gracious was the whole reason Jonah did not want to preach to Nineveh: "because I knew that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and one who relents concerning threatened judgment" (4:2). Jonah's view of God was not Augustinian.

In Edwin Palmer's introductory remarks to his *Five Points of Calvinism*, he describes the foundational premise of the Calvinistic system: "To emphasize the sovereignty of God even more, it is necessary to point out that everything is foreordained by God... It is even biblical to say that God has foreordained sin. If sin was outside the plan of God, then not a single important affair of life would be ruled by God. For what action of man is perfectly good? ... Thus, once again, we confess with full force the absolute sovereignty of God. He predestines, elects, and foreordains" (Palmer, 1979, pp. 82-83).

Five points of Calvinism

Now that it is clear what is the premise or foundation of the Calvinistic system from which each of the five steps will be deduced, we will look at them one at a time. Logically, the acceptance of the first principle, Total depravity, as is defined, will necessitate the acceptance of at least the first three points in a chain of logic. They rise and fall together. Many say all five are inseparably linked together.

Total depravity

All Bible-believers maintain that sin has totally ruined man as the image-bearer of God. He has an inherited, innate and inescapable depraved nature that is prone to self-centeredness, selfishness and rebelliousness. Nothing in man is acceptable to God and there are no exceptions.[9] But does everyone "mean" the same thing when we say this? For the Calvinist this truth means much more than depravity and sinfulness: it is taken to mean the doctrine of **total inability**. Dr. Robert Ketchum, GARB pastor in Waterloo, IA, used to preach that man is "plum dead,"[10] that is, all men are spiritually identical to a corpse. From this analogy the following questions were asked: Does preaching the gospel to a corpse have any hope of success? Can the best singing, impacting illustrations, enthusiastic preaching get through to a corpse? The only thing a corpse needs is a new life, and then the preaching will make sense. Utilizing the syllogism, we are asked to believe the following:

Man is totally depraved.
A totally depraved man is unable to do anything good.

[9] It only took one sin of Adam for God to condemn Adam and place all his descendents and the universe under the curse of sin. James declared if anyone is guilty of violating one of the commandments he is as guilty as if he violated them all (James 2:10).

[10] Derived from Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:15, which describe being "dead in sins."

Therefore, man is unable to repent and believe the gospel.[11]

The two premises do not necessarily lead to the conclusion, and worse it is unscriptural! The Scriptures do not teach that man is **unable to believe the gospel**, in fact, how could God command all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30), if He had decreed that it was impossible for them to do so? That is nonsense and irrational, and worse, it is an insult to the character of God. Another common syllogism is:

Unregenerate men are dead.
Dead men are unable to respond to anything.
Therefore, men are unable to respond to the gospel.

Here the first premise is true, depending on the definition of "dead." In the moment that Adam sinned in the Garden, he died to God, his spirit was separated from God (Eph 2:1; Isa 59:2), but this does not mean he became a corpse or a non-responsive, non-thinking, incommunicative or unintelligent image-bearer of God. Rather, it means that he had no fellowship or part with God, and thus no intuitive understanding of God because of a shared Spirit (1 Cor 2:10). Note however, that his spirit is quite alive since it can clearly understand other humans. Numerous times in the Bible unsaved men communicate clearly with God. Man's spirit is not a corpse. Likewise, until the Spirit of God begins to communicate with man's spirit, they will not understand each other. Man will always misinterpret God when left alone (Rom 1). The "power of the gospel" (Rom 1:16) is evident when the gospel is preached because the Spirit of God will "reprove or convict" unbelievers "because they do not believed in me" (John 16:8-9). This work of the Spirit is pre-regeneration and is a necessary pre-faith work of God to bring a person to Christ (a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ"- Gal 3:24). It is agreed that apart from the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit, men will not be saved, but there is no limit in Scriptures to reproving the "world" of sin because of their unbelief and this does not require a previous regeneration to bring a person to faith in Christ.

Because the Calvinist has superimposed the Augustinian doctrine of absolute predestination on all the themes of the Bible, by which God has decided by unchangeable or immutable decrees who will be saved and who will be lost, then you cannot allow the gospel to be a genuine invitation to all men or even that the Spirit will "reprove or convict" all men who hear the gospel message. For the Calvinist's system to work it requires a doctrine of total inability, not just total depravity. Another syllogism is built on the last syllogism:

Depraved men are unable to believe the gospel
But the elect believe the gospel.
Therefore, the elect must be given the faith in order to believe.

These postulates create yet another problem of their own making: how can a person be commanded to believe, when God knows it is impossible for him to do so? Palmer attempts to deal with this unnecessary problem: "This means that although man is totally depraved and unable to believe, and that although faith is a gift of God produced by the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, it is up to man to believe. He has the duty to obey God and believe"

[11] In the following pages these syllogisms were used by John Parkinson's *The Faith of God's Elect*, pp. 66-89, in his excellent presentation of the tools used to convince the readers of TULIP.

(Palmer, 1979, p. 87). Thus a man must believe, even though God has made it impossible for him to do so!

It is true that man is condemned for his own failure or refusal to believe (John 3:18). One must move out of the realm of justice and human experience to understand how someone could be condemned for something that was impossible for him to have done, that is, man must be able to believe, if God would make it so he could chose to do so. Furthermore, the condemnation (3:19) is just because "light is come into the world, and men loved (chose) darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Their personal choice or desire was not to believe because they loved or chose "darkness" more than "light" or truth. It is not that they cannot; it is because they will not.

Faith is a gift of God

Whatever one's perspective is about God, he must understand the key passages. For example, in the Calvinistic system, since no one can believe Eph 2:8-9 is used to explain that "faith" is likewise a gift of God. Here is how Palmer explains this passage:

> "The question is: Is God the author of redemption alone or also of faith? Does God contribute the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and man contributes his faith? Or is faith also a gift of God? Does salvation depend partly on God (the giving of Christ on the cross) or wholly on God (the giving of Christ to die for us plus the giving of our faith)? Does man keep just a little bit of glory for himself - the ability to believe?" (Palmer, 1979, p. 87).

Palmer misses one of the major points of the teaching: by basing our salvation on our faith in His promises alone without works, Paul declares there can be no boasting, pride or self-righteousness because of anything we did. The Calvinist insists on equating "faith" as a "work" and since sinners can do no "work" for salvation; therefore, God must give the sinner "faith" or he could never believe.

The passage must be examined first.[12] We are "saved through ***faith*** [Gk. feminine gender], and ***this*** [Gk. neuter gender] is not of yourselves, it is a ***gift*** [Gk. neuter gender] of God." Since "faith" is feminine and "this" is neuter, they cannot refer to each other grammatically. Therefore, "this" refers to the whole thought or concept of the passage, i.e. salvation, which is the "gift of God."

In the Bible there is no clear and dogmatic statement that saving faith is ever a gift of God. On the other hand, the Bible clearly states the way in which faith is obtained: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). This is not a mystical, subjective gift that suddenly appears as an epiphany. The Scriptures speak of saving faith as "your faith" (Luke 7:50), "his faith" (Rom 4:5), and "their faith" (Matt 9:2); but never as "the faith of God."

Even when the exegesis of Eph 2:8-9 is understood to refer to salvation as the gift being offered, Calvinists continue to make reference to the gift of faith, since it is essential to their system even if the Bible does not teach it. The argument gets a little "thin" discrediting the value of a personal faith as though it were impossible or worse, something carnal! The following is a lengthy quote of Luis Chafer's defense of Calvinism.

> Now this is just virtually the question, **Who maketh those** who have passed from death to life, and are now advancing towards heaven, **to differ** from those who are still walking in

[12] A major point often overlooks in this verse is the Gk. article before "grace" in the phrase, "For by [the] grace are you saved" (Eph 2:8). Paul is not referring to a general attitude of graciousness, but a specific grace in this context which refers back to His richness in mercy and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ (2:4-7).

> the broad way? Is it God? or is it themselves? The Calvinists hold that it is God who makes this difference; the Arminians-however they may try to conceal this, by general statements about the grace of God and the assistance of the Spirit-virtually and practically ascribe the difference to believers themselves. God has given sufficient grace-everything necessary for effecting the result-to others as well as to them. There is no difference in the call addressed to them, or in the grace vouchsafed to them. This is equal and alike. There is a difference in the result; and from the sufficiency and consequent substantial equality of the universal grace vouchsafed, this **difference in the result must necessarily be ascribed, as to its real adequate cause**, to something in themselves,-not to God's grace, not to what He graciously bestowed upon them, but to what they themselves were able to do, and have done, in improving aright what God communicated to them. **If sufficient grace is communicated to all who are outwardly called**, then no more than what is sufficient is communicated to those who actually repent and believe; for, to assert this, is virtually to deny or retract the position, that what was communicated to those who continue impenitent and unbelieving, was sufficient or adequate, and thus to contradict their fundamental doctrine upon this whole subject. And when the true state of the question, and the real alternatives involved, are thus brought out, there is no difficulty in seeing and proving that the Arminian doctrine is inconsistent with the plain teaching of Scripture,-as to the great **principles which regulate or determine men's spiritual character and eternal destiny**,-the true source and origin of all that is spiritually good in them,-the real nature of faith and regeneration, as implying changes which men are utterly unable to produce, or even to **co-operate,** in the first instance, in, originating; and as being not only the work of God in men,-the gift of God to men,-but also, and more particularly, as being in every instance the result of a **special operation of the Holy Ghost,-an operation represented as altogether peculiar and distinguishing,-bestowed upon some and not upon others**, according to the counsel of God's own will, and certainly or infallibly effecting, wherever it is bestowed, all those things that accompany salvation" (Chafer: 1949, p. 274).

Parkinson points out a major fallacy in this type of logical sequence: "The Calvinist tells us that although the gospel calls on all men to believe, yet men are unable to believe. This reduces the gospel to the same level as the law, which commands a man not to covet, but cannot deliver him from coveting. Because of the weakness of the flesh, the law is powerless to save (Rom 8:3); but by contrast, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom 1:16). The very fact that the gospel is offered through faith brings salvation graciously within the reach of all" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 69).

A valid "faith" is based on a sure knowledge of something true, then on a conscious decision to depend upon or trust in that truth because it implies the understanding and the disposition to trust in the Word of God. Now which part of this biblical concept is the special "gift of faith?" Is it the hearing (illuminating, enlightening, understanding of God's Word) or the trusting (manipulating the mind of man to depend upon what he would never depend upon on his own)? Totally on his own, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God (Rom 3:11), but Paul concludes Romans with the prospect, "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand" (Rom 15:21). As they are told the gospel the Spirit works in His power.

According to Calvinism, the unbelieving enquirer is encouraged to ask God for the faith to believe. How does one ask God for something without already having faith, at least the faith to trust Him for the faith to believe? Does this seem confusing to you, as it does to me? Nowhere in

Scripture is anyone ever encouraged to pray to God for the faith to believe. He is simply presented with truth and told to believe it.

Parkinson points out the inevitable contradictions to the Calvinist's dilemma in Dr. H. Bonar's comments on the idea of asking God for the faith to believe:

> In maintaining the duty of praying before believing, you cannot surely be asserting that it is your duty to go to God in unbelief? You cannot mean to say that you ought to go to God believing that He is not willing to bless you, in order that, by so praying, you persuade Him to make you believe that He is willing. Are you to persist in unbelief till in some miraculous way faith drops into you, and God compels you to believe? Understanding prayer in the Scriptural sense, I would tell every man to pray just as I would tell every man to believe; for prayer includes and presupposes faith. 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' But then the apostle adds, 'How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?' (*God's Way of Peace*) (Parkinson, 1999, p. 69).

Gordon Olson asks eight questions concerning the obligatory granting of a special faith to only the few whom God chooses:

1) Why did Christ bother to witness and persuade the non-elect? He certainly would have known who the non-elect were and that it was wasted effort since He Himself had decided they would never have the gift of faith to believe.
2) Why should Paul bother to use persuasion at all? Luke emphasized the persuasion and confrontation of Paul's preaching frequently in Acts (17:3-4, 17; 18:4; 19:8-9). If it were all of God's miraculous granting of faith, it would be granted merely upon hearing the gospel however it was proclaimed, if at all.
3) Why did Christ marvel at unbelief? If Christ knew faith had not been given to the people of Nazareth (Mk 6:6) why was He amazed at their unbelief?
4) How can unbelief be judged? How could unbelief or lack of faith be judged as sin if God intentionally withheld the gift of faith from the unbeliever? Is it God's will that they do not have faith?
5) How can we explain degrees of unbelief being judged more severely? If God chooses to give faith to some of the non-elect but not to others, how could He justly judge some more harshly than others? (Matt 11:20 ff)
6) How can demonic activity hinder a direct work of the Spirit? In the parable of the sower Satan can intervene in the process of sinners coming to faith (Luke 8:12; also 2 Cor 4:4). If Satan can impede the irresistible work of the Spirit, does this make him more powerful than the Spirit?
7) Why are some classes of people harder to win than others? Paul identified the Cretans as a more difficult people (Titus 1:12-13). Today we would identify the Muslims and upper-caste Hindus as difficult people. If the Spirit immediately produces faith in the heart of any elect, no matter what his religious condition (a dead man is a dead man), then there should be no difference between a Muslim and a nominal unsaved Christian?
8) Why does God give the gift of faith to so many Americans and to so few Libyans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Turks, etc. Is God partial giving preferential treatment to Americans and slighting other people groups? If faith and regeneration have nothing to do with human instrumentality but are all a work of God, why does He not grant this gift truly arbitrarily across the global population since they are all supposedly equally dead (Olson, 2005, p. 228-229)

The chain of reasoning utilized by the Calvinist bound to his logic moves him further from the truth of the Scriptures. From the premise of total depravity he deduces total inability; from total inability he argues that man cannot believe; from the inability to believe it is imperative that faith must be a special gift; because faith is a special gift, the sinner is urged to ask God for the faith to believe.

Unconditional election

According to most theologians all five points of Calvinism are linked inseparably, although the first three are imperatively linked by logic. By deduction unconditional election is the only solution to total depravity, or rather, total inability. Palmer describes it this way:

> "If men are totally depraved and if some are saved, then **it is obvious** that the reason some are saved and some are lost rests entirely with God.... And the decision as to which persons he will work in must rest entirely, one hundred percent, with God, since man, being spiritually dead, cannot ask for help. This then is unconditional election: God's choice does not rest on anything that man does" (Palmer, 1979, p. 25).

The syllogism that explains this concept is as follows

All men are depraved and totally unable to believe the gospel.
However, some men are regenerated and believe the gospel.
Therefore, God must elect which men to regenerate.

Palmer introduces election to his readers with these words, "foreordination means God's sovereign plan, whereby He decides all that is to happen in the entire universe...He has foreordained everything 'after the counsel of His will: the moving of a finger, the beating of a heart, the laughter of a girl, the mistake of a typist - even sin." Palmer goes on to give the Augustinian description of predestination: "While foreordination refers to God's plan for everything that ever happens, predestination is that part of foreordination that refers to man's eternal destiny: heaven or hell. Predestination is composed of two parts: election and reprobation" (Palmer, 1979, pp. 24-25).

Parkinson critiques Jonathan Edwards in his predestinarian treatise *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and argues that the doctrine of God's universal, absolute decree logically leads to an absolute, eternal, and personal election. “These gloomy terms may sound like music in the ears of the elect, but they certainly bring darkest tidings for everyone else! Belief in this system has serious implications for the gospel. The Calvinist tells the gospel preacher that he cannot know which sinners in his congregation are elect, and so he is free to entreat everyone. He is to preach the gospel in inclusive and universal language ***as if*** any sinner may come, while secretly holding that this cannot be so. But this is not the glorious gospel of the blessed God!” (Parkinson, 1999, p. 70).

This situation creates a dilemma to harmonize the inherent contradictions in this theology. Once a person accepts the Augustinian definition of sovereignty, which states that God has eternally and unchangeably predetermined the individual choices and destinies of men, the conflicts between sovereignty and human responsibility become irresolvable, moving the expositor further from the clear evidence in Scripture into speculation and logical imagination. When one reads the Scriptures, no such tension exists, because the Scriptures do not apply election to the salvation of sinners, but to believers and their future blessings!

The Scriptures teach that the evangelist is to urge the sinner on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). The doctrine of unconditional election insists that God has decreed from eternity past who will be saved and who will be passed by (arbitrarily). The gospel message of the unlimited grace of God and full pardon of all sins to anyone who will hear and believe is rendered powerless to save the non-elect. The inevitable cruelty of mocking a seemingly sincere offer, when in effect there is no offer at all, is more than deception. This conflict is often brushed aside as an "antinomy," i.e. a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical. However, in the Scriptures there are no such contradictions.

In an effort to resolve this conflict the common approach is the "parallel lines" or railroad theory, that is, both the sovereignty of God (*a la* Augustinian assumptions) and man's responsibility co-exist in the Bible, only meeting in the distant horizon in the mind of God. On the one track we are told that God, by an irreversible, unchangeable eternal decree has elected which individuals to save and which individuals to pass by. On the other track it is clear that God, in His universal gospel invitation, entreats all men to come to salvation and will hold them accountable for their response. We are asked to accept both ideas even though they are incompatible and permanently in tension. This is all brushed off as the inability of the finite (man) to understand the infinite (God). However, the problem does not originate in Scriptures but rather in man's theology.

> The Augustinian doctrine of election is in hopeless conflict with the Biblical gospel of grace. ... It is customary for Calvinist writers, when confronted with the contradictions inherent in their theology, to resort to Romans 9:20, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" But this retort by Paul was given in reply to the self-righteous Jew who was expecting God to give him preferential treatment. Paul did not mean that God could make a meaningless and insincere offer of pardon to non-elect men, and that such action on God's part would be sovereign and unchallengeable. To argue that God has the right to deal in bad faith with non-elect sinners is to seriously misrepresent the character of God (Parkinson, 1999, p. 73).

Most of the Calvinistic arguments for the defense of unconditional election were targeted against Pelagianism and Arminianism, as if they were the only opposing theologies, when, in fact, there are several opposing viewpoints to Calvinism and Arminianism. For example: (1) election **applies exclusively to saints** and not to sinners, referring to their amazing future with Christ. (2) **Amyraldian** position, initiated by John Cameron (1580-1625) and Moses Amyraut (1569-1664) who taught a universal or general atonement and a particular application through divine election. This view holds that Christ's death was for all men alike, making all men eligible for salvation, with actual salvation conditioned upon individual faith. Then seeing that no one would believe because of their depravity, He chose or elected some to receive the grace to believe. This view is basically a 4-point Calvinist perspective, omitting limited atonement. (3) A **Mediante or Biblicist** (inductive) position which agrees with the spiritual deadness of lost men, but that the first operation of the Spirit in the life of an unsaved person is not regeneration (totally based on the exaggerated metaphor of a dead person, when, in fact, the spirit of a lost person is still quite alive, able to communicate, reason and understand), but the work of conviction, convincing, illuminating, drawing of the Spirit on the unsaved proceed regeneration and faith.[13] This view allows for freewill, but not an independent freewill (that is, independent of God's Spirit). To say that God's Spirit cannot communicate with man's spirit unless it is first regenerated is to

[13] The Spirit uses the law as a "schoolmaster" or "tutor" to teach unsaved persons their guilt before God so that they will seek the Lord ("to lead us to Christ"). (Gal 3:24)

unreasonably limit God's ability to communicate. Numerous times in the Bible God has communicated without any problem with unsaved people, i.e., Adam after the Fall (Gen 3) and Cain (Gen 4).

Salvation can only occur in the presence of the proclamation of the powerful gospel message, because it is there and then that the Spirit works (power of the gospel) in the sinner bringing conviction of sin and understanding of the biblical promises of salvation and forgiveness. Thiessen put it this way, "Is election the sovereign act of God whereby he chose some to salvation solely on the basis of sovereign grace apart from merits or acts of the individual, or is it the sovereign act of God whereby he chose those whom he foreknew would respond to his gracious invitation? What is a working definition? (Thiessen, 1979, p. 257).

The Calvinist system is based on deductive logic, and anyone with the perspective of deducing truth from presumed absolute sovereignty, can only see an arbitrary and unconditional type of individual election as the definition of grace and the means of salvation. Any minimizing of this viewpoint is considered error or practically heresy. If we look at a few of the key passages used to defend Calvinism we can see this viewpoint bias.

Romans 9

In Paul's epistle to Romans he writes of the seven privileges given to Israel (9:1-5). On behalf of those privileges he could not accept that Israel would not believe. Then Paul explains why God made sovereign choices (none of which had anything to do with the individual's salvation) to choose Israel over all the other nations of that time (as He did with Hagar [Arabs] and Esau [Moabites]) to be the people of his choice (election) and through them to bring the Messiah for the entire world (9:6-13).

In 9:14-18 God's intervention in the nation of Israel to protect them and bring them into the Promised Land had nothing to do with individual salvation. It pointed out instead how God works through human frailties to bring about His ultimate purpose to provide the Messiah through Israel. God had mercy on Israel (9:16), not because they deserved it, but because God chose to bless the nation. This mercy did not extend to individuals as only 2 of the original 2 million entered into the Promise Land, but the nation did fully enter.

This is God's sovereign right to choose Israel to bless the world with the Messiah. Pharaoh or Egypt was offered the option of helping Israel, but refused (Notice the hardening was mutual: once rejection began, God magnified his choices by hardening him further). This is why the author to Hebrews warns, "Harden not your hearts…" (3:8, 15).

In 9:19-21 Paul describes the right of God to make choices as to whom will the message of the Messiah be targeted. The ones who would find "fault with God" (9:19) are the Jews of that day. Could Israel reverse God's plan for the Gentiles? No. In 9:21, the Potter is God and the "clay" is Israel (not individual sinners) (See Jer 18:4 for a similar treatment for why God chose to destroy the nation in the Captivity).

The "longsuffering" or "patience" (9:22) of God in this context is on a national scope. God has endured their rebellion for hundreds of years to bring about His ultimate purpose of providing salvation to the world. The "vessels of wrath" (9:22) are pitted against the "vessels of mercy" (9:23). This refers to the nations that "have been made ready or equipped" for "destruction" or "ruin" as opposed to the nations to whom God chooses to make known "the wealth of His glory" (i.e. the Gentiles – the "not my people" in 9:25). This truth is further amplified in 11:25.

Notice the references to the remnant to "be saved" in 9:27-29 are likewise temporal and national, a reference to the survivors who make it through a horrible time of God's wrath.

Finally the application of the chapter is given in 9:30-31, which describes the offering of God's righteousness to the Gentiles ("vessels of mercy") by means of "faith," whereas those (Israel) who attempted to attain this righteousness by works would never attain to it. This was God's sovereign choice but it is always global, and nowhere applied to individual salvation, except where God is offering His mercy to the Gentile nations through faith. Nowhere in this chapter is found the notion of individual election and reprobation.

However, within the rejected nations (namely Israel), "vessels of wrath," are many individuals who are saved, while in the elected, chosen nations for blessing (i.e., the Gentiles) or "vessels of mercy," are many lost. These are the sinners to whom the promised blessing must be taken.

Other passages

Another of the Calvinist core passages is in **Ephesians 1:4-5.** The reader is told "he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love." This "**choosing**" us (*eklegomai*, aorist middle tense, "pick out for one's self") has the objective of making us acceptable ("holy and without blemish") before Him. Then in 1:5-6 it states that He "predestinated us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son." God has "**predestinated**" us (*proorisen*, aorist, "to predetermine, decide beforehand;" from *orizo*, "determine, appoint, fix, designate, declare a thing"), that is, the end of the believer's life is determined and pre-declared to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (see also 1 John 3:2). The theology term "predestination" is more derived from the Latin translation of this word [*praedestinavit*] than from the Greek meaning. God declared that every believer would be absolutely assured that his end would be "to the adoption as His sons" and "to the praise of the glory of His grace." These purposes will assuredly happen or God's Word failed. Predestination has to do with God's declaration of future blessings He purposes for the saints.

> "What must be borne in mind is the fact that "predestination" is not God's predetermining from past ages who should and who should not be saved. Scripture does not teach this view. What it does teach is that this doctrine of predestination concerns the future of believers. Predestination is the divine determining the glorious consummation of all who through faith, and surrender to become the Lord's. He has determined beforehand that each child of His will reach "adoption," or 'the son-placing' at his resurrection when Christ returns. It has been determined beforehand that all who are Christ's shall be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29; Eph 1:5)" (Lockyer, 1977, p. 153).

Palmer considers **John 6:37,39** as "nothing else than unconditional election." When the Jews saw the miracle of the feeding of the five-thousand, they wanted to make Jesus king by force (6:15). These men exhibited neither repentance nor faith, in fact they were interested in the physical food (v. 26). Jesus tells them the only way they can be accepted: "This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent" (v. 29). Those who come in this manner can claim the Lord's words for themselves: "All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and he that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (v. 37).

How were these men to become the "given ones?" Jesus said, "I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believes has everlasting life." The reason they were missing the blessing was "You have seen me and still you do not believe" (v. 36). Their problem was unbelief, not being reprobate from eternity or excluded from the promise by eternal decree. According to the Calvinist, the Lord was rebuking their unbelief, while knowingly withholding the gift of faith from them, and that because of His own eternal decree! This is like condemning a person for being blind when you made the person blind in the first place.

Another passage that supposedly gives support to the Calvinist position is John 10. Jesus as the shepherd said, "the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (10:3). When Jesus came to the world no one knew Him. When He came to his own people, they did not receive him. But there were already some in Israel that were faithful believers in God, before they knew anything about Jesus. But when they heard and saw Him, they recognized Him and followed Him.[14]

The teaching of the passage is not that the sheep here were "elect sinners," but rather, they were already believers in God, who, on hearing Jesus, recognized Him as the Christ and followed Him. Jesus was not insinuating that the rest could never become His sheep because he said, "You refuse to believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me" (10:26-27). He initiated this conversation with an open invitation, "I am the door. ***If anyone*** enters through me, he shall be saved…" (10:9). He did not exclude the possibility that they could become His sheep; in fact, John went on to narrate the fact that some followed Jesus down to Perea and there believed on Him (10:40-42). They did not become His sheep until later, thus at any point in time those who are His sheep are not all of the elect of God.

Parkinson makes a distinction between those who were already believers and those who were still unbelievers in **John 17**. Jesus said they were already believers in God ("They belonged to you and you gave them to me," vs. 6) and the Father gave these early believers to Jesus. He went on to pray for those who were yet to become His followers, "I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony" (10:20).

There is no parallel between Christ not praying for the world and the supposed idea that He did not die for the whole world. It was not because He did not want the world to be saved. In fact, He wept for unbelieving Israel (Matt 23:37) – was He the cause of their unbelief? On the cross He prayed for unbelievers (Lk 23:34) that His Father would not judge them immediately.

He said in John 17:9 that He did "not pray for the world" who would become a host of people, because He was praying for His present disciples that they would be protected, kept from Satan, be sanctified, unified and eventually glorified. Later in the chapter He did pray for those who would later believe through their witness (17:20).

Since the entire Calvinistic system is based on Aristotelian logic, instead of biblical inductive research, then the opposite of election for salvation must be an election for reprobation, or double election/predestination. Berkhof states, "The doctrine of reprobation naturally follows from the logic of the situation. The decree of election inevitably implies the decree of reprobation. If the all-wise God, possessed of infinite knowledge, has eternally purposed to save some, then He *ipso facto* also purposed not to save others. If He has chosen or elected some, then He has by that very fact also rejected others" (Berkhof, 1994, p. 117).

[14] Examples would include Zacharias, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, Simeon, Anna, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel – perhaps the remaining 12 disciples, the 70 disciples, and the 120 disciples at the end of His ministry.

Logically there is no rebuttal, but Scripturally there are conflicts. If one starts with the Augustinian assumptions (God predetermines the unchangeable destinies of all men by decree) then many Scriptures have to be twisted from their meanings. However, election and predestination in Scriptures refer to saints in Christ and their purposes which follow salvation, not how sinners came to Christ in salvation. The will of God is clear in 1 Tim 2:3-6, "…God our Savior, who desires **all men to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as **a ransom for all**, the testimony borne at the proper time."

The Calvinistic doctrine of election is predicated on narrow Augustinian assumptions supported by Aristotelian syllogisms, which has led to a logical limitation of the sacrifice of Christ.

Limited atonement

Deductive logic continues with the hypothesis that is attributed to a ninth-century Benedictine monk, Godescalc of Orbais. His syllogism of limited atonement is:

God has predestinated the non-elect to eternal damnation.
If Christ died for such, His death would have been in vain.
Therefore, Christ could not have died for the non-elect.

As is typical with a logic based theology, it is easy to assume something to be true or to add to the given revelation a deduced concept that is not stated. Nowhere do the Scriptures declare that Christ died only for the elect. In the OT, the blood of the lamb was shed over the mercy seat, which covered the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:22) for the whole nation of Israel. God was satisfied that the righteous claims of His holiness had been met (in symbol, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of the eventual coming of the Lamb of God). It is Christ Himself who became the mercy seat, or propitiation. John wrote, "And He Himself is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not only for our sins but also **for the whole world**" (1 John 2:2). In Vine's Lexicon for "propitiation" he writes, "the provision is made for the whole world, so that no-one is, by Divine pre-determination, excluded from the scope of God's mercy; the efficacy of the propitiation, however, is made actual for those who believe."

The unlimited offering of Christ's death is evident in the NT use of the word "ransom." 1 Tim 2:5b-6 declares that "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom ***for* [on behalf of] *all*,** revealing God's purpose at his appointed time."

When Christ was introduced to the world by John the Baptist in John 1:29 He was called, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Parkinson quotes David Gilliland's commentary on 1 Tim 2, "The sacrifice of Christ is such that He has placed into the sanctuary of eternal justice an infinite payment that leaves the bank of heaven in eternal credit and places God in a position, sincerely and, at the same time righteously, to offer forgiveness and freedom to every prisoner of sin without exception or limitation." (*Believer's Magazine*, February, 1999) (Parkinson, 1999, p. 82).

Why is there such opposition to the concept of Christ dying for the sins of the whole world? Berkhof's logic lead him away from a Scriptural understanding when he stated, "It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved. It is

impossible that they for whom Christ paid the price, whose guilt He removed, should be lost on account of that guilt" (Berkhof, 1994, pp. 395.
Once again Parkinson gives a helpful quote from J. R. Baker in the *Believer's Magazine* (April 1998):

> Scripture not at all supports the alleged doctrine of limited atonement. The error springs from the fact that those who advocate it deal with the scope of the atoning work of Christ by means of human logic, arguing that the Lord Jesus only suffered for the elect and therefore only bore the penalty of so many sins, these being the sins of those who have believed, such believers being predestinated in a past eternity. They argue that if the Lord suffered for the sins of any others then God is logically deprived of the right to punish those others, since that would involve double punishment, the one substitutionarily of Christ and the other meritoriously in the unbeliever's own person. But human logic in divine things is very dangerous. Such natural thought produced 'the mother of God' heresy and other like errors. The sufferings of the Lord Jesus should not be considered mathematically (Berhof 1994).

The inappropriateness of the philosophical or logical methodology used in five-point Calvinism in attempting to explain more than is revealed or twist what is revealed in Scriptures to fit in a man-made system leads people away from the biblical truth into speculation and philosophy. While being concerned about God wasting His sacrifice on people who do not care or cannot respond, the Calvinists have sought to limit an infinite God's perfect sacrifice. However, man's logic has no power to limit an infinite sacrifice. The gift of salvation must first be fully paid for before it can be offered. A paid-for gift is offered freely to anyone who wants it.

The idea that the ***infinite*** sacrifice of Christ only has the value equal to, but not more than, the actual sin debt of only the elect does not coincide with the Scriptural definition of Christ's sacrifice. Logic would dictate that an infinitely valuable sacrifice could never be limited by finite man's sins. In Romans 5:15 Paul wrote that the "grace of God" is not equal to or like man's sin; then in 5:20 he states that where sin abounded, God's grace "much more abounded." It was never intended to be, nor could ever be limited to just the sins of the elect. In fact, much more than man's sinfulness was paid for on the cross according to Romans 8:20. Just as we wait for the final fulfillment of His death on the cross, our physical redemption, so also waits all of creation. His death covered the curse placed upon the entire universe as well.

If it were not paid for then on the cross, the gift offering would be illegitimate. The redemption of man, all men, any man, is fully paid for, awaiting his undeserved acceptance. It is absurd to say that accepting a gift fully paid for is a work of righteousness or has some merit to make a person proud.

Irresistible grace

Of all the chain sequence of the doctrines of Calvinism this one has the least biblical support. The syllogism of the argument goes like this:

Men are totally depraved.
Totally depraved men will resist grace.
Therefore, men must be drawn by irresistible grace.

One of the proof-texts is Acts 16:14, which describes Lydia "…whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." This text is used to defend the teaching of unconditional election and irresistible grace as being selective and exclusive. However, an examination of the references to Lydia reveal that she already "worshipped God" (v. 14). Instead of her supposed "total inability," she was seeking God, as was Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:2). Any such person who is seeking God will find Him. In fact, all of Lydia's family believed and were baptized, as was that of Cornelius.

In both cases, we have an illustration of a sinner responding positively to the truth that he was exposed to and God brought more light until he fully understood the gospel, and believed. The work of the Spirit in his life began long before he understood the gospel and responded positively to each truth, but there is no hint in Scriptures that this began with regeneration. In each case a willing witness was led by God to go to this person with the gospel. This has been the model of the missionary – God moving in a willing believer's heart to take the gospel to a people that have never heard the gospel, but God knows they are responding to the light that they have and are open to more truth of the gospel. As a missionary responds to God's leadings, He will lead the missionary to people He knows are open to the gospel. This is the answer to the question of "what about those who have never heard?"

Berkhof logically differentiates between kinds of grace and calling. He speaks of a universal common grace, general common grace, covenant common grace, special grace (which is seen as irresistible and for the elect only), external or general calling, and internal or effectual calling (particular to the elect). Does God call all who hear the gospel? In the Calvinist scheme there are different kinds of calls issued by God. A reader has to wonder where all this was derived from, since it is not stated in the biblical text. The problem is that if God is extending a common call, it is not a genuine offer of salvation at all. This seems to cast a serious blight on the integrity of God in the proclamation of His gospel.

In the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-23) the different responses are attributed to the different types of terrain [or people], not contingent upon the seed or the sower. Sometimes the different responses are due to the preparation of the soil before the sowing ("good ground" is receptive to the seed- 13:23), the clarity of the gospel message ("does not understand it" – 13:19), the environment ("trouble or persecution" – 13:21) or personal lusts ("worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth" – 13:22). The thrust of the parable is for the listener to question, "what kind of a hearer am I?"

Ordo salutis

Is there a necessary sequence of events to bring a person to salvation? Can logic determine the proper sequence? What comes first? The concept of irresistible grace logically produced another assumption on Scripture: **regeneration precedes faith**. In this syllogism both the premises and the conclusion are wrong:

Depraved persons are unable to believe the gospel.
Only a regenerated person can believe the gospel.
Therefore, a person must be regenerated before he or she believes.

This view, though perhaps dictated by logic, is far from a Scriptural basis. However, this is the essential element of the hyper-Calvinist position that has many ramifications to world

evangelism. In every reference to salvation the new birth (regeneration) is contingent upon personal belief or faith. There is no such possibility of the Holy Spirit being given to an unbeliever, who later becomes a believer. The idea of an initial regeneration of the Holy Spirit before faith is exercised is totally contrary to Eph 1:13, "And **when** you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)– **when** you believed in Christ– you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." The temporal element is clear and simple in this passage: hearing the gospel, then faith and trust in gospel is followed by the reception of the promised Holy Spirit (in regeneration, sealing, indwelling, etc.).

If the Calvinist is correct, then regeneration must precede faith (and hearing?). Here is how one Calvinist theologian describes conversion: William Shedd writes in his *Dogmatic Theology* that the sinner is not called on to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but to perform the following duties: "(1) Read and hear the divine word. (2) Give serious application of the mind to the truth. (3)Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration" (Shedd, 1980, pp. 472, 512, 513).

Thus the sinner is told to pray rather than to believe! This is a different gospel entirely. Nowhere are sinners commanded to pray in unbelief and ask God for the gift of faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17), and understanding the words (Matt 13:23), then believing with the heart (Rom 10:10) the sinner receives the righteousness of salvation by faith (Eph 2:8-9).

On the other hand, Mark Snoeberger, Detroit Baptist Seminary attempts to define the meaning of regeneration, new life, eternal life, new creation and salvation, basically equating all the work of the Spirit to be regeneration, making it first in the order in which we are saved:

> The only solution that survives theological scrutiny is that illumination is the regeneration of the mind, and, as such, that regeneration and illumination occur simultaneously. The placement of faith logically prior to regeneration within the *ordo salutis* has been a prominent if not dominant position among evangelicals since the inception of fundamentalism. And, admittedly, a surface reading of some texts lends to this conclusion. ….In view of these two strands of evidence, placing regeneration logically prior to saving faith emerges as the better solution in establishing a theologically consistent *ordo salutis* (Snoeberger, 2002, p. 93).

By redefining the terms of illumination to make it regeneration, he moves regeneration as the first act of God in saving the "dead" sinner. The fact remains that a number of transformations instantly occur in the individual sinner who recognizes his sins ("the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" - Gal 3:24), which is followed by faith ("after that faith is come" - Gal 3:25), resulting in becoming "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (3:26).

The intense speculation to support a deterministic theological system that depends more on speculation than good exegesis is in error, especially one that has created such controversy since its inception and has been a mind-game to keep from excusing ourselves out from the responsibility to reach the last unreached people group on earth. If God can regenerate them without our involvement ("so He gets all the glory") it becomes a challenge to find the motivation to make the necessary sacrifices to get the gospel to them.

Perseverance of the saints

The overwhelming impact of the Calvinistic approach to theology has been the emphasis on "eternal security," which is supposedly seen in the *Perseverance of the saints*. The basic

theme has been "once saved, always saved." However, the concept is not the ***Preservation*** of the saints, but the ***Perseverance*** of the saints. The meaning is that "the believer will persevere in trusting Christ as Savior...Thus they will always be saved" (Palmer, 1979, p. 68). A common proof text for this concept is Matt 24:13, "But the person who endures to the end will be saved." In the context, this passage is referring to enduring until the end of time when Christ shall return to be "delivered" ("saved") through the days of wrath on earth.

As one looks closely at this doctrine it becomes evident that it is not what it appears to be. To say that a true Christian must persevere in his faith until the end of his life creates a number of problems. John Murry declares that the Reformed position is determined by the thoughts and actions of the believer and maintains that: "It is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is always respective of holiness and fidelity" (Murray: 1955, p. 154).

> A number of Calvinists (Charles Horne, Bushwell) assert that 1 Pet 1:5 supports this idea of persevering until the end of life but seem to miss the point that the "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" depends on a continuation of faith and has to do with the judgment of Christians with regard to future rewards for obedience. The passage in no way deals with the determination of the place of a believer's ultimate eternal destiny. When the Calvinist or the Arminian fails to distinguish perseverance from preservation or when either equates possession of eternal life with a successful follow-through, the reader (or hearer) is led to conclude that each one is dependent on the other, and therefore, that a successful completion throughout one's life is a necessary requirement in a continuing process of determining a believer's eternal salvation. Thus, if we don't persevere now, God won't preserve us eternally. And if God doesn't preserve us eternally, we won't persevere now. This is simply an inclusion of human effort into the biblically supported saved-by-grace-alone-through-faith-alone-in-Christ-alone formula (Badger, 2003, p. 32).

It may seem innocent enough, but when all Scriptures are not taken into account then everything falls through the cracks. For example, God could deal in chastisement with believers, which could result in their untimely deaths ("a sin unto death" in 1 John 5:16), as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). The true ground of security is the finished work of Christ on the cross as revealed in the Word of God and appropriated by personal faith. Parkinson summed it up this way: "The blood of Christ makes me safe and the Word of God makes me sure. But the Calvinist, instead of resting on this solid rock, is urged to look to his own perseverance as the ground of his assurance" (Parkinson, 1999, p. 88).

G. R. Elton, in *Reformation Europe 1517-1559* is quoted by Parkinson to say, "Calvin did not regard the elect as saints on earth, or think that conviction of election was proof of it; only God knows whom He has chosen, though the decree is irreversible and the elect cannot fall from grace. But since no one knows which side of the coin he is on, all men must live in hope rather than certainty of salvation" (p. 88). He goes on to declare that Calvin was following Augustine on this point, who had taught that no one knew for sure if he had been given the gift of perseverance until he had persevered to the end of his life.

The syllogism that is applied to this concept is:

The elect exhibit certain signs which accompany salvation.
At present I exhibit these signs.
Therefore, provided I persevere, I am among the elect.

The implications of this view quickly lead down a dark path of introspection, self-righteousness, legalism, and a works-based hope for eternity. The Arminianist teach that a person may be saved, then backslide and be lost. The Calvinist counters this with the teaching that a true Christian cannot lose his salvation, but must, of necessity, persevere in his faith until the end of his life, or it is evident he never had a genuine salvation. The bottom line is that there is very little difference in practical life between these two views. One view says you can lose it, the other says you never had it. Rather than trust in the promises of God that generated his faith, the Calvinist looks for signs in his life to indicate to himself and to others that he is one of the elect. However you look at it, this makes ultimate salvation to be conditionally based on perseverance.

As a result of this doctrine no one can ever really know who is elect, called, justified. Parkinson quotes Michael Eaton, *A Theology of Encouragement* in which he describes many sincere Calvinistic Christians who are plagued by doubts.

> "I have already urged that introspection is implicit in many aspects of the Reformed doctrine of grace in late Calvinism. Now I wish to underline the fact that the most intense introspection follows if many or all of these emphases are combined. If Christ did not die for all, and if it is possible to have a sorrow for sin that is not true repentance, a faith which is not true faith, a possessing of the Spirit which falls short of true regeneration, if despite any and every 'experience' of the gospel there is a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven, if Paul himself feared loss of salvation, then what remains of the Calvinist's assurance? It has died the death of a thousand qualifications" (p. 23).

John Murray defends the position of the perseverance of the saints against the notion of a once-saved-always-saved abuse in his day of antinomianism.

> To say that a believer is secure whatever may be the extent of his addiction to sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers persevere…. It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of the their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? "He than endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."
>
> Let us not then take refuge in our sloth or encouragement in our lust from the abused doctrine of the security of the believer. 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 (Murray, 1955, pp. 154-155).

Who can argue against these objectives, without reasoning that the only assuredly saved believer is one who reaches the end of his/her life continuing to be faithful and obedient. Unfortunately this concept does not always the way Christians end in the Scriptures. The very fact that there are several hundred commands and exhortations in the NT implies that there is no automatic gear that puts all believers on a single automatic track for holiness. The Bible places the responsibility for growth, obedience and discipleship on the believer and does not rely on any supernatural or mystical intervention on God's part to make sure the believer perseveres. The fusion of the Holy Spirit into our being provides the power for victory over sin but requires our yielding, surrender and discipline (Rom 8 and 12). The judgment passages addressed to the believer warn him of chastisement in the present time (Heb 12:6-8) and the promise of a special level of reception in heaven (2 Pet 1:11) and accountability before the Bema Seat Judgment (1

Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10). This will affect in some way the status of eternity in heaven, but nowhere is failure in the Christian life a token of never having been saved.

There is a thin line between perseverance in holiness to be assured of salvation and striving for holiness to be worthy of salvation as a means of earning it. The gospel message (that eternal life is obtained freely, securely and immediately by faith in Christ) gets mixed up and unclear creating a fear of hell, rather than peace with God and the belief that if one is good enough to the end he will make it. An unclear understanding of the gospel motivates superficial worship and religious service with the false hope of impressing God with one's devotion.

The Calvinist believer lives in a state of uncertainty: will he persevere faithful to the end? The Calvinist who enjoys the full assurance of his salvation does so in spite of his theological system. If salvation is all a process never completed until the end of life, there can be no immediate assurance, but only hopeful thinking.

Summary

Calvinism contains abundant truths which point in the right direction, but sadly, the governing thrust of the system is not a careful exegesis of inductive study. Rather the driving force of Calvinism is the unwarranted Aristotelian deductive logic which twists the truths of God's Word into something different, combined with the deterministic theology of Augustine. The Bible does teach that man is corrupted and separated from God due to the guilt of his personal sin and sin nature, but it does not teach that man is unable to believe the gospel when he hears it. The Bible teaches that man is saved by God's grace through faith, but it does not teach that faith is a gift given to a choice few and denied to others. Election is the special and assured position of the saints for heavenly blessings, but never refers to the arbitrary selection of a few sinners for life and the abandonment of the majority for hell. The Bible teaches that Christ died a perfect sacrificial death that has no limits in its offering of benefits of His righteousness for any sinner who will trust it. The Bible teaches that God offers a perfect salvation to all who will listen, then works in their minds and hearts to bring them to Himself. Because man was created in the image of God, even as a fallen creature, He allowed man to retain a free will, so He makes a genuine offer of His grace to "whosoever will." Nowhere does God force or coerce man to believe irresistibly. Finally, the security of the believer is a promise of His Word, but never contingent on the believer's perseverance in holiness.

Variant Views

Hyper-Calvinism

Although there is a variety of different forms of Calvinism from moderate to hyper-Calvinists, these are due to the inability to accept the implications of their logic-based system. The notion of double predestination is that God, by eternal decree, would choose to save a few, but would likewise predestinate the majority to be condemned forever. If one holds to predestination as God's means of electing of sinners to salvation by eternal decree, then by logical deduction He has predestined the rest to be reprobated from eternity past for eternity future. God's disinterest in the non-elect can only be reflected in those who become like Him.

Four-point Calvinism

A variant form of Calvinism is a reaction to the limited atonement aspect, which is seen as contrary to Scriptures, even though it may make logical sense in the Augustinian system. However, if there is no genuine offer of salvation to the non-elect, what possible meaning could there be for Christ to have wasted His death on the non-elect, which He had no intention of ever saving? In fact, quite the contrary, had He decreed from eternity past that the non-elect would never be enabled to believe, but that they were eternally condemned, then God did not send His Son to die for a meaningless offer. These problems are supposedly resolved by denying this core element of the Calvinist doctrine. The problem is not in the Scriptures, but in the theological system imposed upon the Scriptures. Seldom do the expositors of these positions rely on any exposition of the Biblical text, but rather the proof texts come from the *Westminster Confession* and Calvin's *Institutes*.

Lapsarianism

In the scholastic logic there are two schools of thought regarding when and whom God predestined. Supra-lapsarianism (Latin: *supra*-, "before" + -*lapsare*, "to fall") refers to the notion that the Fall occurred to facilitate God's predestined choice of some individuals for salvation and some for condemnation. In this system it is believed that God chose which individuals He would save before He allowed the human race to sin, and that the Fall was, in fact, the working out of a prior decision to send some people to hell (those He decided to become the reprobate) and others to heaven (those He decided to become the elect).

Infra-lapsarianism (*infra*- "after" + -*lapsare*, "to fall") refers to the fact that the Fall was planned, but not with reference to who would be saved. In this system God planned the race to fall into sin prior to His decision to save or condemn any individual, because, logically, it is necessary to first need to be saved from something before one can be saved. T herefore, the decree of the fall must precede His predestination to salvation or damnation.

Although this was the major decision of the Synod of Dort (1618) with the final decision supporting the Infralapsarian viewpoint (First point of Doctrine, Article 7), and reinforced in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), few today seem to give this issue much attention.

Neo-Calvinism

Among several movements within the conservative Reformed churches, Neo-Calvinism or the "reformational movement" developed out of the theories of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, who was the prime minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905. He fought for the separation of church and state, and other reforms within society. He was part of a "split" from the liberal Dutch Reform Church, which formed the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

One of Kuyper's objections was to the issue of divine grace (God's gracious enabling of select persons to be saved) and the role of the state. He was the first to develop the "common grace" concept within the reformed viewpoint. This was a grace that was "common" or intended for the whole human race without distinction to enable them to relatively control their sinful

natures in society, but it does not improve the sinner's ability to change his moral standing before God. This would become the "prevenient grace" in the Wesleyan theological system.

This brand of Calvinists goes beyond the theology and abstract debates of the Protestant Reformation concerning the atonement and church life, seeking to bring about Christian cultural change and social transformation. They recognize that the only lasting re-formation of the philosophical assumptions that are currently eroding every sphere of culture must be re-thought, and a comprehensive evaluation and re-structuring of all academic disciplines must be made. The special issues of justice, environmental protection, international decency and justice in what is called "sphere sovereignty" are the priorities.

Implications for missions

Hope for man beyond the reach of the Gospel?

One's theology concerning God, man and eternal destinies will have a powerful effect on his behavior and motivation. The Scriptures are very simple and clear: man is lost and damned to hell already because he has never heard and/or believed in redeeming work of Christ on the cross; the only hope for such people is that someone who knows the gospel will be willing to go, find them and share the "good news" with them that whoever will may believe and be saved. God would have every people group on earth to be granted this option if His people were only as concerned for the lost as He is (Matt 24:14).

What about those who have never heard? Dr. Todd Magnum, Dean of the Faculty and Associate Professor of Theology at Biblical Theological Seminary is convinced that according to the Reform faith there is hope for people beyond the reach of the gospel today. He wrote:

> I will contend that full assurance of salvation in the present dispensation is reserved for those who, by divine enablement, fully embrace Jesus Christ (cognitively, affectively, and volitionally), having come to an understanding of the saving relationship with God made accessible to them through the atoning cross-work of Jesus Christ, and who have been fully assimilated into the covenantal community of God's people. Because full assurance of salvation is reserved for such persons, mission efforts should continue with the full support of the covenantal community in order to bring the gospel to those who have never heard its unique message. Nonetheless, I will also contend that **Scripture does not preclude our speculation nor completely discourage our hope for the salvation of some who have never been confronted with the explicit claims of the gospel**. God may, through extraordinary means, albeit fully on the basis of the atoning cross-work of Christ, gain the salvation of some who are denied full assurance (epistemologically) of their salvation. Specifically, I will argue that God may reach some of these: (1) through general revelation (accompanied with an extraordinary ability to discern its truths, which only the Holy Spirit could provide); and/or (2) through extraordinary expansion of the covenantal community's parameters (Mangum, 2004, p. 125).

If one holds to a doctrine of an irresistible grace whereby God can arbitrarily regenerate people who have never heard, or may never hear the gospel message, then such persons "through extraordinary means" God could regenerate and make them become part of the elect. Since this thinking is deducing from one hypothetical situation to another to build some hope where there is none, it is logical for Mangum to say, "I do believe that there is a Reformed way of raising the

question with which inclusivists have been so concerned… we might ask the question this way: 'If God has his elect in remote portions of the world, could he use general revelation to reach them?' Put this way, it seems to me that a Reformed thinker's answer would have to be more ambivalent."
(Mangum, 2004, pp. 126-27)

As the speculative case continues with the trained logic of a theologian, Mangum continues to build his case for the salvation of the unreached:

> Of course, people in remote sections of the world will not respond to the revelation to which they are exposed unless the Holy Spirit works in their mind and heart in an extraordinary way. But is this not true in any case? **All Reformed thinkers recognize** that, unless the Holy Spirit overrides, supersedes, and transforms the depraved human will, no one will respond. The real question is **whether God needs special revelation** to do this work. Given the sufficiency of "information" in general revelation, **it is not implausible** to think that, given a miraculous work in the mind and heart of a person in a remote section of the world, that person could respond to the information they have (Mangum, 2004, p. 127).

If general revelation from nature, and human observation led a person to the conclusion that there is a God who is all powerful and personal, could the Holy Spirit take that awareness as the first step in regeneration? Here is how Mangum speculates about the possibility:

> **What if** a person never hears the gospel, but, by a special movement of the Holy Spirit (**unbeknown to him**, of course) in his mind, heart, and will, is given cause over the course of his life to grow more and more uneasy with the pagan suppositions and assumptions of the false religion that dominates the culture into which he was born? **What if** he, **perhaps** privately, **perhaps** gropingly, with the limited and fallible knowledge that he has, begins to seek and worship the God behind his unease, discomfort, and questions? **Is it possible** that he may find, upon death, that the God he has sought and worshipped, however clumsily and inadequately, was none other than Yahweh, who, by the power of an atonement provided in a Trinitarian plan of reconciliation about which he was **completely oblivious** during his lifetime, has established a relationship with him, a relationship that will now continue into eternity as that of child to Father? Is this possible? "**Perhaps. We don't know**," is the correct biblical answer (Mangum, 2004, p. 130).

Another ray of hope for the lost apart from going to them with the gospel message would be to defend or "vouch for" some who were outside the church. Again notice how easy is it for the deducing logical philosopher to delve into speculation where the Scriptures do not give any such revelation:

> We know that believers take part in the judgments (1 Cor 6:2; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4). **What if** our role in these judgments is greater than we have imagined? Is it possible that believers will have the opportunities to "vouch for" some of those who did not explicitly join the covenant community while on earth, but who are received into the covenant community in eternity by covenant members with whom they showed affiliation by their kindnesses toward them? **If such is the case** that would actually fit the pattern of how God has operated in the past remarkably well. Such an extraordinary expansion of the parameters of the covenant community's margins would be consistent with the kind of extensions of his grace that God has approved before. So, **it would not be too surprising** for God to be pleased at the judgment to bestow his grace indirectly to those "who were not his people" through those of his people to whom he, in this life, displayed his grace directly. Such an extension would not be something unplanned by God; as Matt 25:34

> makes clear, receptors of such "**indirect grace**" would be inheriting "the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world." Such an extension of grace might very well surprise many of God's people (Mangum, 2004, p. 134).

Some authors are too quick to expand upon the revelation, speculate about what they think God is going to do regarding the lost among the unreached people of the world, yet few are critical about it since such theologians are presumed to be correct. It is impressive how far some will go to avoid the issue of our obligation to give up our lives to go and win the lost of the world to Christ. Instead of evangelizing the lost, now we will "vouch for" them in the judgment that we are supposedly in charge of.

> We do **not know about those who are never exposed to an explicit presentation** of the gospel message. God has given us **some room to speculate here**. We **do not know what he will do**, though we are given some grounds to draw both some pessimistic and some optimistic expectations. He calls for us **simply to trust him**; and he is not asking too much of us, **whichever way he decides** (Mangum, 2004, p. 136).

What is it that we do not "know?" The Scriptures are remarkably clear: "he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God" (John 3:18). There is no zapping of the unbeliever with regeneration or that we are more compassionate than God so we can "vouch for" the unsaved. Their only hope is a preacher who will go to them with the clear message of the gospel and challenge them to believe in the power of the Spirit inviting them to call on Him to become their Lord and Savior (Rom 10:14).

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