

Apologetics



*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path...
The entrance of Your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:105,130*

What is Calvinism? Part 1 of 3

THEOLOGY

- * Mankind is separated from God by sin and is in need of redemption.

Romans 3:23, John 3:3

- * Death entered in to the human existence by Adam and Eve's sin.

Romans 5:12, Romans 6:23

DOCTRINE

In this booklet we will examine the teachings of **John Calvin**. His teachings are for the basis for much of the theology in the church. In particular his view of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. In this 2nd part we will look at the teachings of the major rivaling teachings of **Jacob Arminius**.

The simple difference between the two views are how they deal with the answer to these question.

1. Does man have free will to accept or reject God's provision for salvation?
2. Or does God choose whom He will save and whom He will reject for reasons known only to Him?

As with all of our topics we do not put forth our positions to engage in argument, but to make our position clear for those attending our fellowship. This booklet will be in **3 parts**. We begin with the teachings of Calvin and then those of the rival teachings of Jacob Arminius. Finally in the last part, ***How Are We Saved***, we will explain the view of Calvary Old Path, and these should be read in relation to one another.

What is Calvinism?

Calvinism was started by a French theologian named John Calvin who was involved in the Protestant Reformation (1509-1564). Calvinism is in churches everywhere around the world today. It is also referred to as Reformed theology.

John Calvin's system of theology is presented in an acronym known as **TULIP**. People who hold to the doctrines in **TULIP** identify with five points related to mechanics of salvation.

Below are the points which comprise Calvinist theology:

- 1. "T" = TOTAL DEPRAVITY** - The Calvinists believed that man is in absolute bondage to sin and Satan, unable to exercise his own will to trust in Jesus Christ without the help of God.
- 2. "U" = UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION** - The Calvinists believed that fore-knowledge is based upon the plan and purpose of God, and that election is not based upon the decision of man, but the "free will" of the Creator alone.
- 3. "L" = LIMITED ATONEMENT** - The Calvinists believed that Jesus Christ died to save those who were given to Him by the Father in eternity past. In their view, all for whom Jesus died (the elect) will be saved, and all for whom He did not die (the non elect) will be lost.
- 4. "I" = IRRESISTIBLE GRACE** - The Calvinists believed that the Lord possesses irresistible grace that cannot be obstructed. They taught that the free will of man is so far removed from salvation, that the elect are regenerated (made spiritually alive) by God even before expressing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. If a totally depraved person wasn't made alive by the Holy Spirit, such a calling on God would be impossible.
- 5. "P" = PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS** - The Calvinists believed that salvation is entirely the work of the Lord, and that man has absolutely nothing to do with the process. The saints will persevere.

What is Calvin's Theology?

To get an understanding of how those points are articulated, by those who teach the doctrines introduced by Calvin, we can read from his own writings of the subject.

From his writings,

“Therefore, those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children”. (John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 3, Chapter 23, Paragraph 1).

“... individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction.” (John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 3, Chapter 23, Paragraph 6).

As we take a close look at TULIP, expressed in these quotes from John Calvin, we need to ask ourselves is this consistent with the teaching throughout the Bible as a whole? We will look further at that question in part three of this series.

Needless to say such quotes are not necessarily easy to understand, because Calvin's theology there is no justification for God choosing one person over another. In Calvin's view these decisions were made by God for reasons unknown and even in the damning of a human soul, it was to His eternal glory.

Simply put, in this system of theology, there are those who are doomed to eternal suffering and that decision was made before time began.

Conversely, those who are saved were also chosen for eternal reward before time began. As in judgment, so it is with reward, man has no part in the decision and God gives no indications as to why He chose whom He did.

What is Calvin's Theology

A classic Bible passage used by Calvin to express his doctrine is in *Ephesians 1:4-6*

⁴Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

What Calvin believes of this passage is those not saved must be condemned to His glory as well. If those saved are to His glory too, then regardless of their disposition, all is to His good pleasure. Why He Chooses condemnation for some is never explained by Calvin. In his commentary on *Ephesians 1* he states about verse 5,

“But that no doubt may remain, he employs the word good pleasure, which expressly sets aside all merit. In adopting us, therefore, God does not inquire what we are, and is not reconciled to us by any personal worth. His single motive is the eternal good pleasure, by which he predestinated us.”

So salvation is of His will alone and for His good pleasure alone. **Why the condemned are not so explained and how that is His good pleasure is of interest.** The reasons why God chooses some and not others is not something which can be known.

This view is widely taught in churches and reformed theology in all of its teachings has seen a resurgence in recent times.

As with all doctrinal positions it can be expected that there are other views on these matters and before we go into our views we will look into the views of Jacob Arminius, who held rivaling views and the two theological views were somewhat contemporary and at odds over which was true.

We will withhold making any detailed comments until both sides are presented. In part 3, ***How Are We Saved***, we will examine the teaching of Calvary Old Path, in light of the two prevailing schools of thought.

See our 2 booklets that go with the series:

What is Arminianism? (Part 1 of 3)

How Are We Saved? (Part 3 of 3)

Further Reading

We would recommend a short treatment of the two views with a little of the history also included in Pastor Chuck Smith's booklet, *Calvinism, Arminianism & The Word of God. A Calvary Chapel Perspective*.

We would also recommend two other works:

I. What Love Is This - Dave Hunt

II. The Five Points Of Calvinism - George Bryson



On the Path Discernment Ministry

Discernment is always mentioned in scripture in a favorable light. Discernment was promoted as a way to avoid error and cause the believer to continually be seeking and watching with vigilance. Accordingly, these materials are provided for you in order to assist you in growing in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word. We have taken great care to give a thorough and expansive explanation of the positions of the church.

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These booklets are provided to explain Old Path's teachings on topics of theology and doctrine. Should you have questions on doctrinal matters or would like further clarity on these positions, you can email us and we will assist you by researching the needed matters. However, we do not provide these booklets with the intention of debating.