

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

Established 1953

December 2005

Vol. 39 / No. 12

WHAT IS CALVINISM?

by Lee Moses

John Calvin was a very bright, educated, and charismatic man. When he was only twenty-six years old, he published his landmark work, **Institutes of the Christian Religion**. The tremors caused by this work still reverberate throughout the modern religious world, as Calvinism (or select components thereof) is taught in virtually every Protestant denomination. However, this doctrine is rife with error that impugns the love and grace of God, and robs mankind of incentive to love and obey Him.

This issue of the **Fulton County Gospel News** begins a series of articles addressing this unseemly system of doctrine. We will introduce this series by briefly answering the question, “What is Calvinism?”

Calvinism is a system of Augustine’s ideas

The concepts underlying Calvinism did not originate with Calvin. Augustine of Hippo, a man who spent his earlier years of adulthood wandering from religion to religion and philosophy to philosophy, first expressed the basic tenets underlying Calvinism. It is noteworthy that many of Augustine’s doctrines bear remarkable similarities to those of his previous beliefs. Especially could this be said of Manichaeism, a Persian cult which purported to be a blend of all world religions, and held that man’s body is from Satan and therefore evil.

In **Institutes**, Calvin took the teachings of Augustine, and, following their implications, formulated them into a consistent system of doctrine. This system entirely stands together or entirely falls together. If any one of its tenets can be proven false, the entire system falls like a house of cards. Calvin made a number of revisions to this work, which in itself would not appear unusual. However, he claimed to be Divinely led as he penned the pernicious pages of

Institutes. He claimed that he had received visions from heaven instructing him to reform the church. Of course, if he had received direct guidance from God in this endeavor, he would never have required revision. God would not have made a mistake. God would not have changed His mind.

The five points of Calvinism have been organized under the acrostic “TULIP” as follows:

T – Total hereditary depravity

U – Unconditional election

L – Limited atonement

I – Irresistible grace

P – Perseverance of the saints

As has brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., we extend sincere apologies to the pretty little flower of the same name. However, no apology will be forthcoming to the system of doctrine which has bloomed throughout the world with a deadly fragrance.

Calvinism is a misunderstanding of the nature of man

The psalmist exclaimed, “*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14). Truly man has been wonderfully made by his Creator, not only regarding man’s physical attributes, but also in his intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities. Following Adam and Eve’s transgression in the Garden of Eden, there was clearly a fall in the state of man (Genesis 3:15-19). There was a fall regarding man’s work responsibility, his relatively painless existence, his ability to live forever, and his fellowship with God. Apparently dissatisfied that this fall is far enough, the Calvinist adds that every child is born guilty of sin and thus deserving of eternal punishment. The Calvinist also adds that every human being is incapable of responding to God’s offer of salvation until God forces him to respond. Calvinism’s misunderstanding of the nature of man will be addressed particularly in this month’s article by

Denny Wilson, “Are Babies Born Sinful?”

Calvinism is a misunderstanding of the sovereignty of God

Calvinists believe that to affirm the sovereignty of God, one also has to affirm that everything that happens is God’s will. Is there sin in the world? Is there suffering? Are there men and women who will refuse to obey God, and thus spend eternity in hell? If so, they reason, the all-powerful Sovereign God of the universe must wish it so. They fail to take into account that the all-powerful Sovereign God of the universe would desire offspring that **love** Him (compare with 1 John 4:8, 16). Love cannot be coerced; it can only occur by a choice of man’s own free will.

As dictator of Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin was a man of power. For what he deemed heresy, he banished seventy-six and executed fifty-seven between the years of 1542 to 1546 alone.¹ Regarding Calvin’s iron-fisted tenure it has been written,

There is but one word heard or read: *Death*. . . . During the space of twenty years, commencing from the date of Calvin’s recall, the history of Geneva is a bloody drama. . . . At each step we encounter chains, thongs, a stake, pincers, melted pitch, fire, and sulphur. And throughout the whole there is blood. One imagines himself in Dante’s *Hell*, where sighs, groans, and lamentations continually resound.²

Christ sternly prohibited such an approach of carnal reinforcement of spiritual law (Luke 9:53-56; John 18:36). As a tyrannical dictator, Calvin displayed a great misunderstanding of his responsibilities as a man of power. Perhaps this explains his misunderstanding of the responsibilities of an all-powerful God, believing that God would likewise have to be tyrannical if He were to be all-powerful. Calvin and his followers to the present day insist that to disagree with their doctrine is to denigrate God’s sovereignty. Calvinism’s misunderstanding of the nature of God

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPS Publication #211780

. . . is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

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Hosted by TheBible.net

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will be addressed particularly in this month's article by Ted J. Clarke, "Can Just Anyone Be Saved?" and next month's article by Chris Perry, "Can Man Resist the Grace of God?"

Conclusion

Sometimes people speak of a "harmless misunderstanding." There is nothing harmless about Calvinism. It is blasphemous and it is self-condemning. In this series of articles, the reader will find the tenets of Calvinism honestly examined in the light of Scripture. It is our hope that the reader will as well examine those things that are said within these pages in the light of Scripture. *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

¹ F.W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1961), p. 259.

² Audin, *Life of Calvin*, Ch. 36.354; quoted by Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002 printing), 8:493.

ARE BABIES BORN SINFUL?

The Calvinistic Doctrine of Total Hereditary Depravity

by Denny Wilson

The Bible declares, "*There is none righteous, no not one*" (Romans 3:10). "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). The consequence of our sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin occurs when we violate the commandments of God: "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4). God's word is our guide in all that we do as individuals and as the church. When we fail to keep the will of God, we have sinned. Therefore, one who has not reached the mental maturity to be able to understand God's will and be able to control their actions has not sinned.

Unfortunately, there is a doctrine that is being taught in the world that declares that everyone is born a sinner, guilty of sin from birth. This destructive doctrine is sometimes called Total Hereditary Depravity. "Augustine taught that, because of the fall of Adam, all humanity, even infants, are totally depraved. According to Augustine, this condition destroyed the human will and left men in the position of being helpless servants of sin."¹ Easton's Bible Dictionary declares, "Our first parents being the root of all mankind, the guilt of their sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature were conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation" (1090). F.W. Robertson stated, "In our best estate and in our purest moments there is something of the Devil in us, which if it could be known, would make men shrink from us. The germs of the worst crimes are in us all." It has been said by those who support this erroneous doctrine that each person is born with the "original sin" of Adam, making each of us a sinner from birth.

A passage that is used by proponents of Total Hereditary Depravity to support their doctrine (though falsely applied) is Psalm 51:5. David wrote, "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" Regarding this passage, John Calvin (from whom the term "Calvinism" is derived) wrote, "He (David) now proceeds further than the mere acknowledgement of one or of many sins, confessing that he brought nothing but sin with him into the world,

and that his nature was entirely depraved. He is thus led by the consideration of one offense of peculiar atrocity to the conclusion that he was born in iniquity, and was absolutely destitute of all spiritual good . . . we are cherished in sin from the first moment that we are in the womb" (Calvin's Commentaries). Did David mean that he was born with "original sin," that he was a sinner from birth? Regarding this question, brother B.J. Clarke offered three possible explanations to the understanding of the passage:

1) David is simply saying that he was born into a world of sin." Yet, one could be born into a world of sin without being born a sinner. 2) It is also possible that David considers himself to be "shapen in iniquity" because of the sins and sinful activity of his ancestors (Genesis 38:13-20; Deuteronomy 23:2 – Judah and Tamar). 3) A third interpretation of the passage is that David was using poetic language (hyperbole) to express his deep anguish over his sins (in regard to Bathsheba and Uriah).

With regard to this third possibility, Carl Garner wrote,

David expounds upon and confesses the depth of his sinfulness. Such sin as had been committed did not deserve forgiveness. Such consequences of sin could only come from one who had been surrounded by sin and influenced by iniquity for too long. Like a stain that has been "set" in a garment, he recognized that he had given "place" to the devil (Ephesians 4:27) . . . David overstates the expression of his sin to show that he is confessing and not hiding his wickedness.²

Psalm 51:5 does not declare that David was born a sinner and there are reasonable options for the interpretation of the passage.

The Bible teaches that each person is responsible for his/her own sins. "*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*" (Ezekiel 28:15). "Perfect"—what a wonderful way to describe a newborn! Each child is born into this world pure and free from sin. Children do not inherit the sin of their parents. "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him*" (Ezekiel 18:20). "Sin is by definition, individual in

nature, being either a violation of transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), or a refusal to bring oneself into harmony with the behavior God prescribes for His people (James 4:17)" (Garner). Our spirit came from God and will return to Him (Ecclesiastes 12:7). God formed our spirit within us (Zechariah 12:1). We are His offspring (Acts 17:29). God doesn't give an impure, sinful nature to His spiritual offspring. Consider also the words of Christ in Matthew 19:14, "*Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" In Matthew 18:3-4, Jesus declared, "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as the little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" Our Lord and Savior declared that if we want to go to heaven, we must become like little children. Jesus would not ask us to be more like a sinner in order to go to heaven. Children are innocent of sin until they are able to reach a certain level of maturity.

Since a baby does not even know his right hand from his left (Jonah 4:11), how can he/she commit sin by not doing what he/she is incapable of doing? . . . Sin is a violation of our conscience (Romans 14:23). How can a child sin against a conscience that has yet to be developed? (B.J. Clarke).

Each soul is responsible for his/her own sin. "*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*" (James 1:14-15). Our sins are a result of our own lust and desires, not because of the sin of Adam. There is a day coming when we will answer for our sins. We will not be able to blame our sins on Adam. Our eternal home will be determined by how we live. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The false doctrine of Calvinism will cost men their souls. Friends, man is not born in sin. We each sin when we violate the will of God. Our sins will cost us our souls unless we believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), make the good confession (Romans 10:9,10), are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16), and live faithfully until death (2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 2:10). Jesus is

the author of eternal salvation to everyone who obeys Him (Hebrews 5:9). Rather than trusting in a doctrine developed by men, let us put our trust in God, and faithfully follow His will each day.

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¹ B.J. Clarke, "Total Hereditary Depravity," in *Calvinism*, ed. David P. Brown (Spring, TX: Houston College of the Bible, 1998), p.314-331.

² Carl Garner, "Restoring the Joy of Salvation," in *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, ed. Bill Jackson (Austin: Southwest church of Christ, 1989), pp.314-316

CAN JUST ANYONE BE SAVED?

The Calvinistic Doctrine of Unconditional Election

by Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

Quite likely most of the "unchurched" people in the world who believe in some sense in God, Christ and the Bible would say that everyone and anyone could be saved, if they had a desire to do so. A great number of religious denominations also teach that salvation **is available** to anyone who desires to be saved. One of the best known passages in all Scripture seems to teach the possibility of salvation for anyone who would come to God through faith in Christ. John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

However, there are a number of denominations of the Calvinistic persuasion that deny this teaching.

Unconditional Election

Many Baptist, Presbyterian and Pentecostal faiths teach that **not** just anyone can be saved. In the Calvinistic flower of **T-U-L-I-P** the "U" stands for the doctrine of unconditional election. We will let the creed books followed by these groups define their own position.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined or foreordained to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, to the praise

of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice [The Westminster and Savoy Confessions read for this last clause: "and others fore-ordained to everlasting death." - TJC] . . . These angels and men thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number so certain, and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished. ["Of God's Decrees," Chapter Three, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*].

What these quotes teach is that God has chosen a certain number of specific people to be saved and a certain number of specific people to be lost and who those people are in those specific categories cannot be changed in any way. Thus, if you were one determined by God to be saved you will be saved whether you desire to be saved or not. If you were a person chosen by God to be lost, you will be lost and there is nothing you can do to change that determination by God. This also applies to infants. Some are elected by God to be saved; others to be lost. A statement from the same creed book quoted above says, "**Elect** infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. . . **Others not elected** . . . cannot be saved" [Chapter 10, "Of Effectual Calling", emphasis TJC].

Conditional Election

The Scriptures assuredly speak of **God's election** of some to be saved and others to be lost, but this election is not unconditional and arbitrary as Calvinism teaches. God is no respecter of persons, whimsically choosing so many to be saved and all others to be lost without such having any personal choice in the matter! "*Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" (Acts 10:34-35). People are saved or lost because of their personal choices regarding fearing God and obeying Him. Those whom God chose to be saved are those who believe in and put on Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the

adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:3-7).

Please notice that it is **“in Christ”** that we are blessed; that God chose us **“in him;”** that we are made acceptable **“in the beloved;”** and it is **“in whom”** that we are saved. God has elected or chosen those who are **in Christ** to be saved. This is the condition upon which anyone can be one of the elect of God.

God desires that **“all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord **“is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). **It is not God’s will that any should perish!** Shame on Calvinists for saying otherwise. Remember that John 3:16 says that God **“gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”** The last invitation God gave in the Bible to come to salvation says, **“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”** (Revelation 22:17).

Elect In Christ

Dear friend, in God’s will you have as much right to be saved as anyone else. God wants you to be saved, as we showed above, and if you are lost on the Judgment Day it will be because of your choice, not because God chose you to be lost. However, you must be positioned **in Christ**, where God has placed salvation. **“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”** (2 Timothy 2:10).

To be placed **“in Christ”** and be counted as one of the elect of God we must believe in Christ as God’s Son and His work of atonement on the cross for our sins (John 3:16; 8:24; Romans 5:1-2, 6). This faith must be an **abiding faith** that obeys God. Faith alone is dead and does not save anyone (James 2:14-26; Hebrews 11:6= God rewards those who diligently seek Him). Based on a faith that obeys (Hebrews 5:9), one must **repent** of past sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 17:30-31). We then must make a public confession of our faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10), and then be baptized into Christ

for the forgiveness of our sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Baptism (immersion in water in the name of Christ) is the means God has chosen to place us **“in Christ”**—and puts us in a state of being God’s elect, His chosen. Please notice the following two passages that state clearly that we are **“baptized into Christ.”** **“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”** (Romans 6:3-4). **“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Galatians 3:26-27). **“In Christ”** we are God’s elect and we are saved. There is no promise of salvation for those outside of Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). God has chosen whom He will save. Will you choose to be saved? **Yes, anyone who follows God’s will can be saved.**

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

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 Publication #211780