

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

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DID OR DID NOT CHRIST DIE FOR ME?

The Calvinistic Doctrine of Limited Atonement

by Lee Moses

With regard to the Calvinistic “TULIP,” last month’s issue of the **Fulton County Gospel News** began by examining the “T”–**Total Hereditary Depravity**, and the “U”–**Unconditional Election**. This month we resume with the “L”–**Limited Atonement**.

The doctrine of limited atonement is described by its advocates as follows: “[Christ] came into the world to represent and save only those given to Him by the Father. Thus Christ’s saving work was limited in that **it was designed to save some and not others**” [emphasis mine, LM].¹ If true, no child could sing those precious words, “Jesus loves me, this I know”–because no child could **know** if Jesus actually loved him and died for him (compare with 1 John 4:9). Instead, one is left with the uncertain question, “Did or did not Christ die for me?”

Limited Atonement and the TULIP

As ludicrous as this doctrine sounds on the face of it, limited atonement is essential to the system of Calvinism. The reasoning that Christ did **not** die for all mankind is inexorably linked to Calvinism’s other tenets: (1) Since according to Calvinism man is totally depraved (total hereditary depravity), man cannot make a spiritually profitable decision. (2) According to Calvinism’s doctrines of unconditional election, **irresistible grace**, and **perseverance of the saints**, those whom God arbitrarily chooses to save will be forced to be saved and to remain saved. (3) If Christ died for all mankind, then, according to Calvinism, all mankind would have to be forced to be saved and to remain saved, since man cannot make a spiritually profitable decision. But no Calvinist will concede that all mankind will be saved.

So if the limp petal of limited atonement is plucked, the entire TULIP of Calvinism wilts into the satanic soil from

which it arose.

Christ Died for the World

As demonstrated in last month’s article on unconditional election, God’s desire is that all have the opportunity to be saved (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Since God desires the salvation of the world, and the only means of salvation is to be found in the death of Christ, it stands to reason that the death of Christ is for the salvation of the world.

In asking for whom Christ died, one might consider what was His initial mission in coming to earth: “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10; compare with 1 Timothy 1:15). Did Jesus come to seek and to save only **some** of the lost? “That which was lost” presents Christ’s object of seeking and saving as one collective whole. Moreover, there is no good reason to limit “that which was lost” to “those who were predetermined to be saved,” since “that which was lost” includes all human beings of accountable age (Romans 3:23).

Christ’s death is specifically said to be for those who are sinners—for those who are **at enmity** with God:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

Christ died for those who could die in sin, estranged from God: “*And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?*” (1 Corinthians 8:11).

Did Christ die for the world?

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh

away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15).

... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself... (v. 19).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Christ’s Death Must Be Received

The Scriptures do at times speak of Christ’s death as being particularly in behalf of the church (John 10:11; Romans 5:19; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). This does not contradict other Scriptures which plainly teach that Christ died for the world. However, it does confirm that not all will receive the **blessings** of Christ’s death and atonement. So Christ’s death is particularly in behalf of those who will receive its benefits. Paul wrote, “*For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe*” (1 Timothy 4:10).

Christ’s death can only be received by obedience to the Gospel; that is, by being “*baptized into his death*” (Romans 6:3-4; compare with 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 6:17). **Anybody** can receive the Gospel, otherwise there would be no need for the Great Commission, the charge to preach the Gospel to all the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). If limited atonement were true, there would be no need for the Great Commission, because the unconditional elect would be saved without the Gospel, and the reprobate could not be saved even if he desired salvation. Christ gave the invitation for “*all ye*” and “*whosoever will*” to partake in the blessings of

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CAN MAN RESIST THE GRACE OF GOD?

The Calvinistic Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

by Chris Perry

It should dishearten anyone who professes to be religious to see the division and confusion that is rampant in the religious world today. The gulfs that separate this group from that group, the rifts that create one splinter group after another, have been in place for so long that they are—to many—an accepted part of the so-called “Christian” landscape. But surely this is not as God meant it. Rather, God demands unity based on His word, and nothing less than *that* unity will be tolerated (compare with Galatians 1:6-9; Romans 6:17; John 12:48; James 3:17).

If an interested person were to examine many of the religious beliefs that are contrary to the word of God, they would find a common denominator – Calvinism in some shape, form, or fashion. Of the religious principles presented by Calvin (I say “presented” because Calvin did not originate the ideas; he merely refined and codified them), which are often referred to by the acrostic TULIP, the idea of *irresistible grace* holds an important place. The **Westminster Confession** (adopted by the Presbyterian Church, among others) provides a useful definition of this false doctrine:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ . . . **This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man who is altogether passive therein,** until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it (emphasis mine; full text available at <http://opc.org/-documents/CFLayout.pdf>).

As is obvious from the above quote, the major points of Calvinism are inseparably linked. Irresistible grace depends on at least two assumptions from TULIP:

God *unconditionally elects* certain people to either eternal life or eternal condemnation; and, because of his *total hereditary depravity*, man is unable to react on His own to God’s divine call. Of course, these ideas are unbiblical and anti-biblical, and will be systematically defeated in other sections of this and last month’s FCGN.

We should not dismiss the doctrine of irresistible grace as only meaningful to some stuffy, old-world religionists. Instead, we should recognize that some of the most popular evangelical denominations are based on Calvin’s teachings. For instance, the **Abstract of Principles** of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary includes the following:

Regeneration is a change of heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit, who quickeneth the dead in trespasses and sins enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the Word of God, and **renewing their whole nature,** so that they love and practice holiness. **It is a work of God’s free and special grace alone** (emphasis mine; full text available at www.sbts.edu/aboutus/pdf/abstract.pdf).

Included in this pitiful attempt to explain the new birth are references to man’s *total hereditary depravity* and God’s *irresistible grace* (note: the same abstract also espouses *unconditional election* as “God’s eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life”). In another copy of a particular Baptist **Articles of Faith**, the new birth is described as happening “in a manner above our comprehension, not by culture, not by character, nor by the will of man, but wholly and solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with divine truth.” Here, therefore, in a nutshell, is the doctrine of *irresistible grace*—grace saves us whether we like it or not and whether we want it or not.

Despite what Calvin might have borrowed from Augustine, and despite what creeds and confessions of faith might say, the doctrine of *irresistible grace* is nowhere found in Scripture. In fact, holding to such a doctrine does great damage to fundamental principles clearly taught in God’s word. For instance, to believe in *irresistible grace* is to disparage the character of God Himself. A God who “*will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4), who is “*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter

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His atonement (Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17). While all will not partake in these blessings, all who willingly receive Christ’s death will.

Conclusion

Did Christ die for the purpose of saving only some and not others? Clearly God purposed that Christ’s death serve as the atonement for the world. The fountain of life provided by Christ’s death flows forth with abundant atonement for **all**. He who desires spiritual life will never find the atonement of Christ a dry fountain, contrary to the erroneous doctrine of limited atonement. Christ’s atonement is not limited—but those who decline to partake of it limit themselves from receiving the greatest of blessings possible. So, dear reader, if you have not yet tasted the living water of atonement, hear what the Spirit saith:

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).

¹ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, **The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, Documented** (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1982 reprint), p. 39.

3:9) would not bestow His loving and saving favor only on those He had chosen against their will. A God who is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34) would not arbitrarily dole out grace to those who might not want it. Instead, such a God would send His Son, the embodiment of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9, 12-13), because He “so loved the world” (John 3:16). Such a God would bring a grace that “hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12).

As well, one who holds to *irresistible grace* theology must dismiss man’s freedom to choose. God made man in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), which included giving him the capacity for free will. Even Calvinists must accept this point, as the **Westminster Confession of Faith** states: “God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.” As proof of this statement, the **Confession** cites the same passages that faithful preachers have cited to reference free will: James 1:13-14, Deuteronomy 30:19, John 5:40, and so on. Of course, the **Confession** goes on to claim that in the Garden of Eden:

Man, in his state of innocence, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; **but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it . . .** [and] by his fall into a state of sin, **hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation** (emphasis mine).

However, the writers of the **Westminster Confession** defeated their own argument, for all of the passages they cite proving free will *prior to the fall* were spoken *after the fall!* Was Moses asking the Israelites to do something they had “lost all ability” to do? Was James teaching that we are drawn away from goodness “by our own lusts” when we were never connected to goodness so as to be drawn away? As always, false teaching is ludicrous.

It must also be stated that to believe in *irresistible grace* is to deny clear teaching on obedience. After Peter, as quoted above, recognized the impartiality of God’s nature, he stated, “*But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*” (Acts 10:35). As well, he described the Christians of the 1st century as those who had “*purified [their] souls in obeyed*

the truth” (1 Peter 1:22). Paul told the Roman Christians, “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you*” (Romans 6:17). If acceptance by God is dependent on fear and working righteousness; if purification is accomplished by obeying the truth; and if we have to obey God’s form of doctrine in order not to be the servants of sin—if all of these things are true, and they are, then grace is not irresistible. Rather, God’s grace is offered to all of mankind, only with the stipulation that those who hope to receive it must *obey Him* to do so. Those who choose not to obey are resisting the grace of God.

Dear friend, are you entangled in a man-made system that bases its beliefs on the unbiblical doctrines of Calvinism? Are you basing your faith on the traditions of men, instead of the word of God? If so, do not “*frustrate [cast off, bring to naught, reject] the grace of God*” (Galatians 2:21). Give up your error and obey the truth. Only then can you receive God’s gift of grace.

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CAN A CHILD OF GOD FALL FROM GRACE?

The Calvinistic Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints

by Geoff Litke

The evils of Calvinism saturate the minds and hearts of religious people throughout the world. Perhaps without realizing, most who consider themselves Christians have swallowed at least one of the petals of the T-U-L-I-P.

However, Calvinism is not an “*a la carte*” religion; as one faithful elder stated, “the whole ball of wax must stick together or melt together.” In other words holding any one point implies the rest and without any one point the system fails. The reason for sobriety in this matter is not merely academic. Faith in Calvinism fails for therein is NO HOPE!

The sweetest sounding selling point of the Calvinistic brand of “Christianity” is the doctrine of “Perseverance of the

Saints.” Even to those who cling to this “perseverance,” the name may seem foreign. It is canned and labeled in various ways. Some say, “Once saved always saved,” “Once in grace always in grace,” “One cannot fall from grace,” “Impossibility of apostasy,” or “Eternal security.” No matter what label it bears, the doctrine contains only a false comfort. One writer said, “Old Calvinism is so popular because it extends hope without responsibility.”¹ The Bible, from cover to cover, denies the notion that a child of God cannot so sin as to be eternally lost.

Various men through the years have counted in the Bible warnings against falling and apostasy. These students find around 5,000 separate warnings against spiritual departure. Yet many believe it is not possible. Whether in the candid way one sins and “trusts in God’s grace” or simply never gives diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), they deny the true nature of grace. Putting it formally, the Westminster Confession of Faith plainly states,

They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.²

This is said to depend not on their freewill, but because God said so and therefore makes it so despite any sin they commit. Some partial Calvinists “*totin’ half the wax*” do not openly proclaim this idea, but it is demanded by their doctrines. The God of Calvinism is not the God of the Bible. If one objects to this fact, they ought to show the nobility of the Bereans (Acts 17:11), follow the advice of Isaiah, “reasoning” (Isaiah 1:18), and prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The Calvinist’s conundrum goes like this: if God is sovereign (as the Calvinist defines “sovereign”) saving man apart from man’s intentions, desires, or actions, but God loses one of His saved; then God cannot be sovereign. Therefore none will be lost. In other words, if you believe God saves you apart from anything you want or are even capable of wanting or doing, then you become lost; the failure is with God; not you, not the world. Therefore you cannot be lost.

The reality is that one may so sin as to fall from grace. Paul wrote to Christians in Galatia who were believing the Judaizing teachers who taught that gentiles must be circumcised and keep

some portion of The Law of Moses for salvation. He said in plain language, "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; **ye are fallen from grace**" (Galatians 5:4; emphasis GL).

Later in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews warned those on the cliffs of apostasy. As an example he pointed out those who had once believed, but subsequently rejected Christ:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-5).

These had in fact fallen away though they had been in fellowship with the Holy Ghost and at one time repented. The end of these souls was to be burned (6:8).

Finally, Paul drew from clear typology to warn the Christians in Corinth of the consequences looming before them in their present course. First Corinthians 10:1-12 declares that some in the past had fallen, and admonishes the Corinthians not to do likewise. Notice, both Israel of old, and Christians believed (Exodus 14:1; Psalms 106:12; compare with 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 11:6). Both they in the wilderness and the Corinthians were baptized (1 Corinthians 10:2; Romans. 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27). God declared both saved and sanctified (Exodus 14:30; Mark 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2). The Holy Spirit pronounced both the "children of God" (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:1; 1 John 3:1-2; Galatians 3:26). Both parties ate of the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink (1 Corinthians 10:3-4; John 6:51; 1 Corinthians 3:2; John 7:37; Revelation 22:17). The children of God in "aforetime" lusted in the wilderness and committed the sin of fornication among many other sins. The verses in view powerfully teach that they did, the Corinthians were doing the same, and Christians living today might fall in the same transgression (1 Corinthians 10:8-10; compare with 5:1; 6:9-11). The final admonition of this section is as clear an admonition on the possibility of apostasy as one could find:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:1-12; emphasis GL)

It is evident from these examples in addition to numerous others that one may indeed "fall from grace". The fact that one may fall does not imply that he must (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 1:10). However, when one sins so as to be lost they are not only dead (James 5:19-20), but their latter end is worse than their beginning (2 Peter. 2:20).

Calvinism is a sad doctrine bearing frustration for all who place their hopes therein. Succinctly stated, "If you seek it you can't find it; if you find it you can't get it; if you get it you can't lose it and if you lose it you never had it!"

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¹ Wayne Coats, "The Perseverance of the Saints" in **Calvinism**, ed. David P. Brown (Spring, TX: Bible Resource Publications, 1997), p. 296

² **The Westminster Confession of Faith** (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), Ch. XVII:1.

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

- LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
- PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

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