

The Five Points of Calvinism

There are two main camps of theology within Christianity in America today: Arminianism and Calvinism. Calvinism is a system of biblical interpretation taught by John Calvin. Calvin lived in France in the 1500's at the time of Martin Luther who sparked the Reformation.

The system of Calvinism adheres to a very high view of scripture and seeks to derive its theological formulations based solely on God's word. It focuses on God's sovereignty, stating that God is able and willing by virtue of his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, to do whatever He desires with His creation. It also maintains that within the Bible are the following teachings: That God, by His sovereign grace predestines people into salvation; that Jesus died only for those predestined; that God regenerates the individual where he is then able and wants to choose God; and that it is impossible for those who are redeemed to lose their salvation.

Arminianism, on the other hand, maintains that God predestined, but not in an absolute sense. Rather, He looked into the future to see who would pick him and then He chose them. Jesus died for all peoples' sins who have ever lived and ever will live, not just the Christians. Each person is the one who decides if he wants to be saved or not. And finally, it is possible to lose your salvation (some arminians believe you cannot lose your salvation).

Basically, Calvinism is known by an acronym: T.U.L.I.P.

Total Depravity (also known as Total Inability and Original Sin)

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement (also known as Particular Atonement)

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints (also known as Once Saved Always Saved)

These five categories do not comprise Calvinism in totality. They simply represent some of its main points.

Total Depravity:

Sin has affected all parts of man. The heart, emotions, will, mind, and body are all affected by sin. We are completely sinful. We are not as sinful as we could be, but we are completely affected by sin.

The doctrine of Total Depravity is derived from scriptures that reveal human character: Man's heart is evil (Mark 7:21-23) and sick (Jer. 17:9). Man is a slave of sin (Rom. 6:20). He does not seek for God (Rom. 3:10-12). He cannot understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). He is at enmity with God (Eph. 2:15). And, is by nature a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3). The Calvinist asks the question, "In light of the scriptures that declare man's true nature as being utterly lost and incapable, how is it possible for anyone to choose or desire God?" The answer is, "He cannot. Therefore God must predestine."

Calvinism also maintains that because of our fallen nature we are born again not by our own will but God's will (John 1:12-13); God grants that we believe (Phil. 1:29); faith is the work of God (John 6:28-29); God appoints people to believe (Acts 13:48); and God predestines (Eph. 1:1-11; Rom. 8:29; 9:9-23).

Unconditional Election:

God does not base His election on anything He sees in the individual. He chooses the elect according to the kind intention of His will (Eph. 1:4-8; Rom. 9:11) without any consideration of merit within the individual. Nor does God look into the future to see who would pick Him. Also, as some are elected into salvation, others are not (Rom. 9:15, 21).

Limited Atonement:

Jesus died only for the elect. Though Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient for all, it was not efficacious for all. Jesus only bore the sins of the elect. Support for this position is drawn from such scriptures as Matt. 26:28 where Jesus died for 'many'; John 10:11, 15 which say that Jesus died for the sheep (not the goats, per Matt. 25:32-33); John 17:9 where Jesus in prayer interceded for the ones given Him, not those of the entire world; Acts 20:28 and Eph. 5:25-27 which state that the Church was purchased by Christ, not all people; and Isaiah 53:12 which is a prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion where he would bore the sins of many (not all).

Irresistible Grace:

When God calls his elect into salvation, they cannot resist. God offers to all people the gospel message. This is called the external call. But to the elect, God extends an internal call and it cannot be resisted. This call is by the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts and minds of the elect to bring them to repentance and regeneration whereby they willingly and freely come to God. Some of the verses used in support of this teaching are Romans 9:16 where it says that "*it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy*"; Philippians 2:12-13 where God is said to be the one working salvation in the individual; John 6:28-29 where faith is declared to be the work of God; Acts 13:48 where God appoints people to believe; and John 1:12-13 where being born again is not by man's will, but by God's.

Perseverance of the Saints:

You cannot lose your salvation. Because the Father has elected, the Son has redeemed, and the Holy Spirit has applied salvation, those thus saved are eternally secure. They are eternally secure in Christ. Some of the verses for this position are John 10:27-28 where Jesus said His sheep will never perish; John 6:47 where salvation is described as everlasting life; Romans 8:1 where it is said we have passed out of judgment; 1 Corinthians 10:13 where God promises to never let us be tempted beyond what we can handle; and Phil. 1:6 where God is the one being faithful to perfect us until the day of Jesus' return.

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