

## Some Questions for Calvinists

We are defining Calvinists as those committed to the theology of the five-point TULIP. In this acronym, “T” is for *total depravity*—unsaved people are incapable of responding to God on their own. “U” is for *unconditional grace*—by His sovereign decree God dispenses saving grace to the unsaved apart from any human will or merit. “L” is for *limited atonement*—Jesus Christ died only for the elect, those sovereignly chosen by God before time, not for all humanity. “I” is for *irresistible grace*—those whom God elects to salvation cannot reject His grace and the benefits of Christ’s atonement. “P” is for *perseverance*—the elect will continue in faith and good works until the end of their lives. These core beliefs make Calvinism *deterministic* (God’s sovereignly wills all things that happen) and *monergistic* (God is the sole Actor, as opposed to *synergistic* where humans can cooperate or respond to God). Deterministic Calvinism raises some significant questions.

**Why do you believe that spiritual death means total inability to respond to God?** Adam and Eve responded to God in the garden after they sinned and died spiritually (Gen. 2:17; 3:9-10). Being made in the image of God includes the capacity to respond to spiritual truth, which is why God holds people accountable (Rom. 1:19-28; Acts 17:30). The phrase “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) does not mean total inability, but total spiritual separation from God. The prodigal son was called “dead” but was able to repent (Luke 15:17-24). (See *GraceNotes* no. 46)

**If non-elect people cannot respond to God, how can God hold them responsible for rejecting His offer of salvation?** Is it fair that God condemns people for eternity because they do not believe the gospel if He determined they could not believe it? He is judging them for not responding when He made it impossible to do so. This would make God the Author of their unbelief.

**Do you believe that God is love?** If God sent his Son to die only for a few, would not His love be limited and restrictive? This cannot be characteristic of a God who is love (1 John 4:8). If God can love all people, why would He not? If God would send His Son to die for a few, why not for all?

**If God predetermines some people to hell, why would He create them at all?** It would be more characteristic of a loving God never to create the non-elect than to create them and consign them to suffer torment eternally.

**Can you say that you love God if it is predetermined apart from your free choice?** Love requires free will and personal choice. A love relationship is based on mutual affection. It is not love when one person coerces another. And if love is decreed by God, why is it the first and greatest command (Matt. 22:36-39)?

**On what basis do you change the meaning of “all”?** When the Bible says that Jesus died for the sins of *all* the world (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Tim. 4:10), do you really believe that *all* does not mean every person, but only some? You must import your theology to interpret *all* as “all kinds of people” instead of all people in the world. The plain and simple meaning of the promise in John 3:16 is that everlasting life is available to every person in the world. How else could God express His all-inclusive love?. (See *GraceNotes* no. 48)

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**How can you defend biblically your belief that regeneration must precede faith?** Isn't that imposing your theology on clear texts that teach otherwise (like John 3:1-16; 5:24; 20:31)? That belief is based on the misunderstanding that total depravity means total inability to respond to God.

**Since you believe that God's election, irresistible grace, and gift of faith guarantee that the elect will persevere in good works, why are New Testament exhortations to obey God and do good works necessary?** It makes no sense to command the inevitable.

**How can you share your gospel with any confidence?** If God has determined that only the elect will be saved, you cannot tell all unsaved people that God loves them, or that Jesus died for them, or that they can believe in Him for salvation. Some may be non-elect.

**How can you have or offer anyone full assurance of salvation?** You believe that those who profess belief in Christ as Savior must persevere finally and fully to the end of their lives to prove that they are truly saved. But since you cannot predict the future, you cannot offer full assurance in the present. You believe that all the elect will surely be saved, but you cannot know if a person is elect until the final moment of their life. It contradicts salvation by grace through faith when assurance of salvation depends on one's performance. (See *GraceNotes* nos. 6, 28, 73)

**Do you think that those in the Bible depicted as believers were non-elect because they did not persevere in faith and good works?** For example, Saul died in rebellion against God, Solomon died an idolator and adulterer, Ananias and Sapphira died as liars, and some Corinthians died while abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:30). None is declared condemned eternally. (See *GraceNotes* nos. 49, 55, 61)

**Why do you call yourself a Calvinist?** Is it because you believe in God's sovereignty? Or is it because you believe that God has chosen some to be saved? It may surprise you, but those beliefs are shared by many who are not Calvinists. Some non-Calvinists believe that God sovereignly decrees that people have free will so that His will and man's will work in congruence. (See *GraceNotes* no. 72)

**Do you want to be named after John Calvin?** Did you know that what most Calvinists believe today differs somewhat from what John Calvin taught? After Calvin died (1564), his beliefs were modified and codified in the Canons of Dort (1619), which do not reflect his views exactly. Why not use the terms "Christian" or "Biblicist" which exalt God's Word over one man's interpretations?

## Conclusion

The deterministic theological system called Calvinism is fraught with problems that raise many questions. Instead of letting their theology push them, Calvinists should let the Bible lead them. The plain meaning of God's Word taken in context should come before the interpretations of men whether it be John Calvin or any ecclesiastical confession. Salvation by grace through faith in Christ is initiated by God but requires man's response. God's sovereignty includes and is not negated by man's free will. As in any genuine love relationship, two wills work together free of any forced coercion. In this God is glorified and the essence of our humanity is affirmed. (See *GraceNotes* no. 75)