

“The Error of Calvinism”

Elder Rick Oliver

“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.”

The Calvinistic view or the “doctrines of Grace”, as many Calvinistic proponents prefer, revolve around 5 points commonly known as TULIP. The theory of Calvinism holds that God created the human race, with billions of souls coming into the world since Adam, arbitrarily elected a comparative few of this number to go to heaven, but all the others who were not predetermined are doomed for an eternal hell. Despite the historical battles there can be no real middle ground between the Calvinist position and that of the non Calvinist. Calvinism says men cannot respond to God and then condemns him for not doing so. This in itself is an injustice of the character of God. Christ died for all men and it is not His will that any should perish. Calvinism de-emphasizes man’s responsibility to respond to the gospel and thus does much harm to the “way” of salvation. The Calvinistic theory denies even the most elemental teaching of God’s word. Calvinism is a contradiction to the fundamental understanding regarding how God interacts with humanity and when its worst consequences are put into practice, it perverts Scriptural evangelism.

John Calvin lived from 1509 to 1564. He was a former Roman Catholic lawyer who converted to French Protestantism and fled for refuge to Geneva Switzerland where he soon became the most prominent leader of the Protestant “Reformed Church.” After winning independence from Spain, the Dutch Netherlands (often called Holland), adopted Calvin’s “Reformed Church” as their state church. It is the same as the Presbyterian Church adopted as the state Church (Kirk) of Scotland.

Jacobus (James in English) Arminius, was a highly respected Dutch theologian who lived in the Netherlands from 1560-1609. Note that their ministries did not overlap. Arminius was a Calvinist, but he dared to question the severity of Calvin’s determinism which allowed man **no part whatsoever** in his own salvation. While Arminius lived, the slavish and persecution prone disciples of Calvin could not dislodge him. After Arminius’ death, his followers published a “remonstrance” protesting the rigid intolerant Calvinism of their state church. The contest which followed culminated in the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) in 1619.

Politics prevailed, and the “Arminians” were condemned as “heretics” without even being allowed a fair hearing, and deprived of their churches, persecuted and exiled by their intolerant “Calvinistic Brethren.” It was this synod which first formulated the famous “five points of Calvinism” and imposed them upon all ministers and members of their churches. This had nothing to do with Baptists at the time, but Calvinistic influence upon England and all of Britain in 1619 and thereafter was very great. This was a philosophical debate which originated among Roman Catholics about 400 A.D. when Augustine succeeded in getting Pelagius and his followers condemned by the Roman Emperor as “heretics,” although he was the innovator and the Pelagians supported the long held Roman Catholic position.

Results of the Synod of Dort do not present a pretty picture for the origins of the five points which professed Calvinists cherish and jealously guard from any deviation. What are they? Famously described by the acronym TULIP, **they are: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election (in past eternity), Limited Atonement (of Christ’s blood to a select few), Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.**

Notice the preponderance of their unscriptural and superfluous adjectives in their conversation! If anyone rejects any of these added adjectives they are accused of also rejecting the scriptural nouns they are describing. This is extremely arrogant, and most Calvinists are consistently guilty of false accusation of others.

Reformed Resurgence

Calvinism is a doctrine that has been thoroughly debated for centuries and in this servant's opinion it is "a misrepresentation of God." A present day resurgence of Calvinism or what is commonly known as "reformed theology" is leading and influencing men into a web of philosophical error in the name of intellectual theology. The movement is becoming so widespread that it's capturing national attention among many evangelicals. Note a recent article that appeared in "Christian Research Journal":

"Reformed Theology Resurgence:

Many young evangelicals today are embracing Reformed theology, to the extent that Time magazine has ranked it number three on its list of ten ideas that are changing the world. Igniting the new passion for Calvinism are notable Christian leaders such as John Piper, Mark Driscoll, and Albert Mohler. Signs of this Reformed revival include the first printings of the Calvinist-flavored ESV Study Bible—completely sold out— and the increased popularity of Calvinist blogs such as "Between Two Worlds."...

CALVIN, CALVINISM, AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

Reformed theology emphasizes the teachings of John Calvin (1509–1564) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531).² Calvin's own theological viewpoints are expressed in the Institutes of the Christian Religion. Doctrinal creeds such as the Heidelberg Confession, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession represent the major tenets of Reformed theology.³ The Reformed tradition has also given Christianity many great teachers, preachers, and theologians such as Louis Berkhoff, Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Kuyper, John Owen, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, and George Whitefield.

An extremely controversial aspect of Reformed theology is its understanding of divine election. Drawing on various passages (e.g., John 6:35–40, 44, 65; Rom. 8:28–30; 9:6–24; Eph. 1:3–6), they believe "God in eternity past chose a number of fallen creatures to be reconciled to himself. In time Christ came to save the chosen. The Holy Spirit enlightens the elect ones so that they can believe the Gospel and receive salvation. The elect can never resist the work of the Spirit nor fall away after receiving salvation..."

It is necessary to note, moreover, that the Five Points of Calvinism are understood by many to be an interrelated, harmonious, self-contained system; thus, rejecting one point is tantamount to rejecting every point, and the falsity of one point falsifies the whole system. Many young evangelicals thirsting for theological substance are quenching their thirst by drinking from the deep cistern of Reformed theology."

"Reformed Theology Resurgence" (<http://www.equip.org/articles/reformed-theology-resurgence/>)

I fear the intellectual enticement of this doctrine is captivating the minds of many who are thirsting after theological sustenance. Our country stands in spiritual poverty and a revival that leads to the genuine salvation of souls is the only thing that will suffice. What America needs is a return to Christ and not a return to Calvinism. We need a return to the elemental truth of the gospel and not a return to intellectualism. The calling America needs to hear is the calling of God, repent and believe the gospel, because without true Holy Spirit salvation none will escape the eternal flames of hell.

Monergism: An Old Cancer by a New Name

Calvinists are famous for coining new words to describe their philosophical ideas. "Monergism" is a recently adopted theological term which does not appear in the bible or any historical Baptist writings. It cannot be found in any English Dictionary, Greek Lexicon, or even in an Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The definition according to its advocates on the internet seems to indicate that God alone saves souls. With further investigation, what Monergism really means to a Calvinist is that God saves without man's cooperation, hence just another cover up for the erroneous doctrine of **irresistibility**. I firmly believe salvation is solely of God, yet I will surely be falsely accused of being a synergist by those who proudly boast the doctrine of "Monergism."

Does God alone save? Yes! He is the only Savior, and he is the sole elector of His people. Salvation is not a Synergistic process nor is it Monergistic. Neither of these unscriptural adjectives are appropriate descriptions of regeneration. God does not need our cooperation but he will not regenerate one who does not submit to the gospel. The sinner's response to the drawing of God is not what saves him. However, all men are called upon to respond to God as this call is to all sinners! ("The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9) The greek word choréo, translated "should come" in this verse means: "To go from, give space, place, room, give way, yield, or come to some place". God is not willing that any perish but that ALL would yield to repentance which is graciously offered in the scheme of redemption and presented by the Gospel as men are drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is typical Calvinistic conceit and narrow mindedness which falsely accuses advocates of what they cannot understand! The concept of God which Augustine of Hippo brought over from his former fatalistic embraces (paganism, Manicheanism, and neo-Platonism) could never allow his Catholic God to condescend enough to allow man even the tiniest participation in his own salvation. Augustine had an extremely difficult time yielding to the Catholic doctrine of Almighty God becoming a man through the womb of a woman. Pagans with their many inferior gods generally held in respect one most high god who was beyond the reach, or taint, of human hands or understanding. Thus Monotheism might be embraced by some of them, but the condescension of the eternal Logos (John 1) to also "become flesh" (in the "likeness of sinful flesh" ... "yet without sin"), the "only begotten son of God," was utterly repulsive to them, as it remains to Muslims today. It is easy to discern from Augustine's own writings and from his many biographers and commentators that he had a very difficult time yielding that characteristic of paganism which his later intermediate religions also tended to embrace. That final step made him able to join the Catholics, but did not entirely remove his prejudice against condescension of the most-high god.

What Augustine formulated has been correctly called "determinism" rather than "fatalism," because it attributes the determination of all things (particularly all good things) to his most high monotheistic god instead of to the lesser goddesses called "Fates." Augustine was the first to credit his adopted god, as defined by the Trinitarian Catholic concept, with predestination of all human beings who will ever be saved to that eternal destiny before they have any existence as separate and accountable spirit beings. From this resurrected doctrine, long ignored by most Catholics, John Calvin and his "Reformed" disciples embraced and strengthened this doctrine of Augustine defining it as "unconditional election" in past eternity of all who will be eternally saved, and its other consequential four points which emanate from that belief. John Calvin was not shy about attributing this to Augustine in his writings exactly as I have stated it. Of course he did not credit Augustine's Paganism. We will address the important historical aspect of Calvinism later in this introduction.

Not a Biblical Argument

My challenge to a professing Calvinist is to defend one simple argument: "Jesus Christ died for all men". I still contend that if this one simple fact in the word of God cannot be defeated the entire system called CALVINISM falls!

Many Calvinist refuse to argue any one single proposition and tend to refer to "historical context" for authority. That is because the doctrine of Calvinism is so complex it cannot even be defined or defended by the scripture alone. Jesus preached a simple gospel, and nowhere did he make such outlandish appeals as Calvinism does. Calvinism confuses the simple message that Jesus preached. John 12:46-48 states: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. 47. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Jesus plainly emphasizes man's responsibility concerning the gospel.

When it comes to the scripture, the arguments for Calvinism are always contextually based or taken from scripture removed from its overall context rather than identifying with the general tenor of the bible. Let every

opinion, creed, doctrine or belief stand or fall by the word of God alone. When Calvinism is held to the trying fires of the word of God, this doctrine cannot take the heat. Only a few scriptures can be used to support this teaching and my challenge to is consider the whole and not just the part because the argument of Calvinism is simply contextually based and does not fit the general message of the bible.

Calvinism is always based on philosophical arguments. In light of the scripture the doctrine falls. The Calvinistic arguments are based on how God acted in eternity past. This in itself is error, for God is “omnipresent” or not bound by time or space, hence the philosophical argument: Is God outside of time or subject to time? Has time always existed, or is it created? Our finite minds have difficulty understanding how God moves and acts without restriction in regard to time and space. As an eternal being, God exists in the past, present and future. Foreknowledge is a rather mind boggling thought but one must understand the essence of an eternal being and the nature of his gift of eternal life. To us the past is water under the bridge, unchangeable by us. To us the future is an uncertain forecast of rain, impossible for us to know with certainty. The only place where certainty and changeability meet for us is the present. God is an eternal being and as many have put it, **“God is the eternal now.”** “If you picture time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn.” Through God’s infinite knowledge nothing happens as a surprise however understanding that he made man with a will and the ability to choose right from wrong is essential to understanding God’s foreknowledge. **“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end”** Eccl 3:11 (NASB). In this sense Calvinism really is just a philosophical argument.

How Dead is Dead?

Calvinist’ believe that man is so dead that he cannot even respond to the gospel. The Lord regards man as possessing will, the quality that makes a being a person—not an inactive corpse or a robot. While I believe in the doctrine of depravity, Calvinism holds the view of total **“inability”** rather than depravity.

Man’s nature is totally without “good” in the sight of God. It is enough to say that our nature is depraved, which means **“corrupt”**. To rigid Calvinists, however, this adjective “total” means that man can do absolutely nothing to move God toward his salvation, nor will he ever be inclined to seek God until after he is quickened (made spiritually alive) by God’s grace and Holy Spirit. Only after God graciously zaps a chosen spiritually dead person with regeneration can that person begin to repent and believe the gospel, although “all men everywhere” (Acts 17:30) are commanded to repent and believe. If I say that “Salvation is of the Lord,” (Jonah 2:9) but I insist that gracious **“enabling”** by the Holy Spirit is a more proper description than quickening for what happens before repentance and faith, and is absolutely essential **“before”** man is able to repent and believe unto eternal salvation, I am falsely called a synergist, an Arminian, a Pelagian or maybe even a Semi-Pelagian. Where do I get the scripture to offer evidence of God’s enabling and man’s responsibility? John 6:44 is sufficient, although it is not alone. Jesus said “no man **can** come to me”, the original uses a derivative of the Greek word $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ (dunamai), which means “enabling power”. The enabling must be given from the Heavenly Father for a sinner to come to Jesus and be saved. The quickening (new life) comes when the “operation of God” (Colossians 2:12) culminates in saving “faith,” which is the end product of God-wrought repentance. **It is through this Divinely created faith, or by means of it, that God regenerates and saves souls.** Calvinists often quote Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it (the faith) is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast,” but their “five points” prove that they do not believe that salvation is granted through faith. Rather these points suggest that what they really believe is this: **“by divine decree (in past eternity) are ye saved through grace** (undeserved Divine favor), and (repentance) and faith are mere products of that decreed grace.” I believe as strongly as any Calvinist that faith is not of ourselves and must be created in us by God’s grace. However, I do not believe their claim that all of this was decreed for certain persons before any of us existed.

Time and again Calvinist’s herald their tired old arguments that a “spiritually dead person is incapable of doing anything.” This contradicts the words of Jesus in John 5:25, “The hour is coming, **and now is**, when the **dead shall hear** the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” So Jesus declared, the dead shall hear before they

live (are quickened)! How? They are miraculously enabled to hear the voice of Jesus (same as the Holy Spirit today) so they can repent and believe the gospel. The Calvinistic view is in direct opposition to Jesus.

This is what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:8. The (Holy) Spirit breathes (whispers) where He wills, and you hear His voice (a breathed voice is a whisper!) but you cannot tell where it is coming from or where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the (Holy) Spirit! This is the experiential part of the regeneration experience described by Jesus. By this, and subsequent witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we know we are saved and elected, not primarily by changed lives and providential happenings, as many Calvinists tend to teach. We heard the voice of Jesus though the Holy Spirit first in “reproof” (John 16:8), which we sometimes call conviction, but we were not then already regenerated or saved. Jesus promised that the same Holy Spirit being sent to comfort and lead the saints will also “reprove the world (not the elect) of sin, righteousness, and judgment.” This reproof was a means to our salvation and regeneration. It was a part of God’s process or “operation.” (Colossians 2:12) Calvinists would have us believe that souls truly “reproved” by the Holy Spirit are already elected or even regenerated. So many Calvinist take conviction for conversion. Others take changed lives and providential evidences as conversion, a current example would be Paul Washer, another leading reformed Calvinist, who emphasizes lordship rather than a regeneration experience. Lordship is the evidence or fruit of regeneration from the view point of another, but it is not the personal witness of regeneration that occurs in an individual’s soul.

Archibald Alexander (July 18, 1823 – November 12, 1886) was a noted Calvinistic Presbyterian preacher and president of Princeton College. Alexander embraced the Great Awakening revivals as genuine, yet even after a genuine conversion experience he reverted back to his Calvinistic views. His grandfather had been saved under the preaching of George Whitefield in the 1740’s, but Archibald, reared in Western Virginia among Presbyterians never once heard the “new birth” mentioned at all. He went to Spotsylvania County Virginia to teach school, at a time when both Separate and Regular Baptists had recently taken over the area from the Episcopalians. There a common millwright challenged him as to whether he had been “born again.” When he expressed doubt the man answered, “I reckon if you had been, you would know something about it.” This convicted his heart, and started him a seeking the Lord’s salvation as Baptists teach. While in humble private prayer, he found and experienced the new birth, which he afterward always proclaimed. Yet, on at least one occasion he reverted to his rigid Calvinism and its idea that regeneration must proceed all of God’s graces working in man. He expressed doubt concerning John Wesley’s intimation that he had remained a lost sinner until after he had that wonderful experience with God in Aldersgate Street in the thirteenth year of his Anglican ministry. Archibald Alexander thought that the judicial reader would conclude that Wesley was just as devout of a Christian “before” that experience as he was after. Wesley ought to have known what he expressed at the time. His Methodist followers championed such an essential “salvation experience” for most of two centuries afterward. God forbid that Baptists should ever be affected by such a doctrine as afflicted that good Presbyterian preacher. So are the pitfalls of five point Calvinism.

Were You Really Lost “before” You Were Saved?

If it can be discerned that a man is really regenerated but professes to believe five point Calvinism, I suggest the following interrogation: When you were reprov’d of sin by God’s Holy Spirit, and under heavy conviction, did you believe you were going to Hell? Do you think that the Holy Spirit convinced you that you were going to Hell? If the answers are yes, and they generally will be for one who is truly born again, then one must consider this, “Why would the Holy Spirit lie to you?” If you were elected as an individual spirit to eternal salvation in past eternity, you were never at any time in danger of going to Hell! You only thought you were. Did God’s Holy Spirit convince you of a falsehood to induce you to repent of sin and seek a salvation which was already determined? If the one being interrogated has had no such genuine salvation experience, this line of reasoning will not work, but if they have, and they are too honest to resort to sophistry, they will tend to concede the point. I am sure that some advocates of this philosophy have already worked out a clever escape from this dilemma.

My question for any Calvinist that has truly experienced the new birth is this: if God in eternity past elected you personally to be saved and the Holy Spirit convicted you, why would you hold to a view that would call the work of the Holy Spirit a liar? If God had already chosen you to salvation why would God through the Holy Spirit convince

you otherwise? Did the Holy Spirit lie? Would you not go to hell if he died in that condition? Such teaching is absurd!

The answer is this, God has condemned all men under sin and all men have been “predetermined” to go to hell because of Adam’s sin (Rom 6:23). God changes the sentence of death “**in time**” when men come to Him on his terms, repenting of their sin and faith believing, then the “gift” granted wholly by God is eternal life.

I absolutely believe to this day that if I had died lost the weeks prior to my salvation experience on Oct 20, 1974 I would have been in hell. The Holy Spirit himself convinced me of this which led me to seek after God. I still believe it 38 years later and men that are called to herald the gospel should preach it! To be lost is to stand condemned before almighty God. That is, as historic Baptist figures have oft proclaimed, “**experimental**” knowledge. God reveals your lost condition and God also reveals your salvation.

A Point “in” Time

Not only is the “unconditional” adjective not connected with God’s “election” in Holy Scripture, but sufficient scriptures are available to place God’s election of His saints “**in time**” rather than **in past eternity**. God’s foreknowledge is not in dispute, but what exactly He predestined is. Romans 8:29 tells us that those whom God “did foreknow, he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” That is all! Certain ones God foreknew were predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. This does not say how or why God chose these ones. All these foreknown and predestined ones He “called.” Called to what? Called to sainthood! Calvinists regularly confound this “call to be saints” in Romans 8:30 with God’s call to repentance described elsewhere. Jesus once described His call to repentance with “many are called (invited), but few are chosen (elected).” Many are called to repentance, but few of them are elected. Who calls or invites these folks who never become the elect? It is a real stretch to deny that it is God, but that is a dodge Calvinists often employ. All of those called by God to sainthood are justified, which means “declared right with God” by God himself. Not one is left out. Many called to repentance by God never become the elect of God. Jesus said so. All of the called saints are glorified. They share in His honor and brightness. In order to confuse these two callings Calvinists invented another unscriptural adjective (“**effectual**”) for the noun “**call**.” **They admit that this imagined effectual call they deem irresistible happens in time.** They cannot deny that infants are incapable of experiencing this effectual call. Therefore, if this “call” in Romans 8:30 is their imagined irresistible and essential “effectual call” of those already elected to salvation, no infants who die in infancy can be justified and therefore cannot be saved. This is a difficulty for them, necessitating another unscriptural adjective in the expression “elect infants.” Neither the expression nor any such idea can be found anywhere in Holy Writ! It is found in Calvinistic documents, even in some Calvinistic Baptist documents of the past.

Where does the election (choosing) of God’s saints take place? **Is it in past eternity or in time?** Let Peter answer: “Elect ... according to the foreknowledge of God, through (more accurately “by means of”) **sanctification** of the (Holy) Spirit, **unto obedience** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1st Peter 1:1-2). Now let Paul answer: “God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through (more accurately “by means of”) **sanctification** of the (Holy) Spirit and belief of the truth. (2nd Thessalonians 2:13) These apostles tell us that the election of God comes through, or by means of (instrumental case), **sanctification** (setting apart) of the Holy Spirit and belief of the truth (faith). Peter gives the extent of the setting apart necessary to be one of the elect, (that being, unto “obedience” **(submission or surrender which is the very essence of repentance)** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus). This tells us that the atonement bloodshed on Calvary is applied or appropriated to the individual soul by the agency of God’s Holy Spirit. So, because we are elected through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit’s sanctification unto faith obedience, and application of Christ’s blood, **then the election must be in time rather than in past eternity.** Foreknowledge, and predestination of a Savior and conformance of God’s chosen saints to His image, occurred in past eternity. We were said by Paul to be “chosen in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4), **but elected as individual souls to sainthood and service in time, through the Holy Spirit’s agency.** There is no inconsistency here, except in the prejudiced mind. I do believe in a “Divine Election”

with God as the sole elector. The reasons for His choosing are his own, but they cannot be arbitrary or with respect to certain persons. God is neither arbitrary nor a respecter of persons.

Can God's Call be Resisted?

"Irresistible" is another unscriptural adjective applied to grace by Calvinists. Grace means undeserved favor. It does not need an additional adjective to clarify its meaning. They say "irresistible grace" when they evidently mean **irresistible "Spirit"**. Their five points teach that God's Holy Spirit conviction is irresistible. It eventually proved apparently so for Saul of Tarsus, like others who are too honest to cease considering it. But what ultimately happened to the other Pharisees who heard Stephen? Like Paul, the 3000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 were "pricked in their hearts." They immediately asked, "what shall we do?" They were soon saved. This is essentially the same question Saul asked Jesus as he was unconditionally surrendering his will to Him. But how many of the hardened Pharisees who heard Stephen ever came to salvation. No others that we are aware of! Stephen accused all of them, and their fathers, of **resisting the Holy Spirit**. They were "cut to the heart." The word used here literally means "sawn in two." This seems every bit as severe as the goading of the foreign Jews who found salvation on that great day of Pentecost. The fault was in the Pharisees themselves, not in their lack of unconditional election. Paul revealed it in Romans 9:32 after he asked **why** the unbelieving of Israel did not "attain to the law of righteousness (which they sought)... **because they sought it not by faith**, but as it were by the works of the law." Instead of "falling upon that stone" that they might be "broken," (Matthew 21:44 & Luke 20:17-18) and then made whole by God's grace, most of them stumbled over this stumbling stone to the loss of their eternal souls in Hell. This reason Paul gave for their failure is expressed in the midst of some of the favorite scripture texts of the five point Calvinists. He blamed it on their misuse of the God's means of grace

What might God see in the sinful creature that pleases Him to give more grace (favor) than usual? We have a clue in Jesus' account of the sowing of the word. Only the man who received it in "an honest and good heart" brought forth the fruit God desired. If God must forcibly make such a heart, how does this parable make sense? We know that no lost sinner's heart is without sin in God's sight, and so can never be called "good" in that sense. The clue is in the word "honest." Some people reject what they choose not to believe and promptly forget it. Others may even fight against it, but they fear God too much to forget it. Such was Saul of Tarsus. While he initially tried to reject the gospel, it continually goaded him until he surrendered to Jesus, with "Lord, what will you have me do?" While he trembled in astonishment lying on his face on the road, what did Jesus say? He first asked, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" then he immediately answered that question with, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (goats)" (Acts 9:4-5). Just because a man's flesh and carnal mind fights against the truth does not mean his "honest" heart is not still wrestling with it, trying to grasp it. God's gracious offer of mercy and pardon can be resisted.

TULIP: A Flower which Grew from Poisonous Seeds

When we charge that Augustine "invented" the doctrine of unconditional election, we mean he was the first to introduce it strictly as a Christian doctrine. As explained in this treatise, the theory of foredecrees or absolute predestination was taught long before his day, but not by Christians. His doctrine was an adaptation from the philosophy of others before him.

The Doctrine of Unconditional Election originated with Augustine, Roman Catholic Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa. Augustine gave permanent shape to the theory of eternal, unconditional election sometime near the close of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth, as his life span extended from A.D. 354 to 430. Written in the testimony of Dr. Loraine Boettner, a Presbyterian minister and a staunch Calvinist, speaking of unconditional election, says:

"This cardinal truth of Christianity was first clearly seen by Augustine, the great Spirit-filled theologian of the West. In his doctrines of sin and grace, he went far beyond the earlier theologians, taught an unconditional election of grace, and restricted the purpose of redemption to the definite circle of the elect."

(The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p. 365).

According to this testimony, Augustine was the -first to avow the doctrine of unconditional election and limited atonement, going "far beyond the earlier theologians". This means that no one before him taught unconditional election and limited atonement. Augustine, then, was the first exponent of this doctrine, as, according to Dr. Boettner, the doctrine, was not clearly seen by any theologian before him.

What Augustine labored to engraft into Catholic theology was a novelty to the generally Pelagian stance of his mentors. Most of these facts can be determined from the writings of John Calvin a millennium later, as Calvin labored to resurrect Augustine's "Determinism" and make it the centerpiece of reformed theology. Augustine encouraged the authority of the cowardly Roman emperor Honorius to actively persecute Pagans, Manicheans, and all "Christian" groups dissenting from Roman Catholicism in North Africa. He wrote in defense of the doctrine of persecuting "heretics" in the name of Jesus. He succeeded in getting the Trinitarian Donatist dissenters in North Africa condemned as "heretics" along with all of the Pelagian Catholics in the empire. **(Pelagians essentially embraced the free-will salvation doctrine of fourth century Catholicism,** today shared by Campbellites, and modern popular "fundamentalist" evangelists' message that salvation comes by simply "accepting Christ as one's personal Savior.") Augustine also defended infant baptism as valid. Calvin later embraced these doctrines also. In fact, I have not found one doctrine of Augustine which Calvin did not embrace. Calvin's excommunication from Augustine's Catholic "church" required him to redefine "church" as the aggregate of all of the predestined elect rather than loyal Roman Catholics. All else he seemed to embrace, including the determinism which Catholics had quickly shed following the death of Augustine and the conquest of North Africa by the Arian (Unitarian) Vandals. Had the Vandals burned Augustine's library, including more than 200 volumes of his writings, how different, for better or worse, might have been Western civilization and its Christendom! Certainly his determinism might have been buried in antiquity! There is at least one practical reason that Calvin and his Reformed followers embraced Augustine's doctrines so heartily. Augustine, who was revered as the "father of Western Catholicism," never mentioned such later innovations as purgatory, intercession of saints, worship of Mary, selling of indulgences, and other of the more recently adopted Roman Catholic superstitions. Calvin's superior writing ability made Augustine's ideas which he adopted, seem like the antidote to poisonous Catholic teachings. Calvin's Geneva, became a refuge for all persecuted "Protestants" who seemed inclined to embrace his "Reformed" theology or "church." This included very many English Puritans as well as neighboring Scottish Presbyterians. So, Calvin's doctrines became deeply imbedded among English Puritans long before many of them gave up hope of enough reform of the Anglican Church and became persecuted English "Separatists," often called "Independents." Many of these "Separatists" fled to Holland after the 1580's relieved that Protestant "Reformed" nation from the domination of Catholic Spain. There they not only encountered the state established Dutch Reformed Church, but also the numerous Dutch Anabaptists, formerly descended from the Waldenses. Tens of thousands of these Anabaptists had fled to England among other Dutch refugees to escape Spanish persecution prior to the 1580's. Most were never repatriated, but were absorbed into English towns, which fifty years later were crawling with a new sect called "Baptists." These were the English General (atonement) Baptists, the first to be called by the "Baptist" name, who rejected the most radical points of Calvinism. English Separatists tended to be Calvinistic, but their many known connections with Anabaptists in both England and Holland, resulted in the early rise of English General Baptists long before the **first known Calvinistic "Particular" Baptist Church** came together in London in the 1630's from remnants of English Separatist churches who felt they must adopt immersion of spiritually regenerated believers as the correct mode of baptism. Crosby's history records that even these folks took the precaution of sending Richard Blount to a group of Anabaptists in Holland to obtain immersion at their hands and bring it back, although not all of them thought this lineage was a necessity.

In 1642 Oliver Cromwell's Puritans overthrew the English king and ruled the country, until 1660, when because of too much chaos and instability along with Cromwell's death, the monarchy was restored. Both King Charles II and his brother who succeeded him (James II) had been partially reared in exile in France where they both acquired admiration for King Louis XIV and the Roman Catholic religion. English Particular Baptists, who had increased under Puritan rule, feared the monarchy and desired to show their alliance with the Presbyterians. The Anglican Church's Calvinistic Westminster Confession had been adopted during the years of Puritan Rule and remained in place despite the rapid departure of Anglicans (Episcopalians) from the Calvinism expressed therein. **The second London Confession of the English Particular Baptists copied much of the Westminster Confession's**

rigid determinism, and expressed it much more strongly than they had in their first confession from the 1640's. The preface of that document admits to their purpose of showing their agreement with the Presbyterians and Puritans. **The Philadelphia Confession in America was practically a carbon copy of that second London Confession**, for the simple reason that the churches involved were mostly descended from English Particular Baptists.

Another factor thought to be a reason for the English Particular Baptists' rapid rise in comparison with that of the English General Baptists during this same period was the subversion of many English General Baptists by the "Quaker" movement. George Fox who had been a "seeker," believing that the church of Jesus Christ was so hopelessly corrupted that a prophet must be raised up to ever restore it, claimed such a restorationists' revelation in 1647 and launched the "Society of Friends." These zealous "Quakers" fooled a lot of their neighbors into thinking that they were more Spiritual than any others, and this seemed to appeal to many English General Baptists residing in the same localities so much so that they joined them.

Credit must be given to all the Calvinists for their perpetual emphasis on education, one result of which was that most of Baptist writings, including most Baptist history before the middle 1800's, was written by Calvinistic Baptists. Too often, their bias affected their reporting. For example, Particular Baptist writers often appeared loath to admit any historical descent from the notoriously "Arminian" Dutch Anabaptists. They often seemed more willing to claim their entire descent from English Puritan Protestantism, and be content to think of themselves as the most properly reformed of all Protestant denominations, indebted greatly to Calvinistic input. This not only flies in the face of obvious history, but you cannot derive the Anabaptist concepts of "freedom of conscience" and "equality of all citizens" from any line of Reformed Catholicism! It is obvious to the unprejudiced mind who preserved these ideas through the dark ages of Catholic persecution.

The historical argument eases the mind with the reasoning that it's acceptable so long as others believed it. Historical reference from Baptist history or any other history really bears no weight in the light of the scripture. Admittedly, many Baptist figures were considered Calvinistic and believed in a type of election but even the so called "Calvinistic Baptist" yield no justice to a misinterpretation of the scripture and for the most part it can be easily proven that many of the same men preached free grace as well.

Another misappropriation is assuming that all Baptist electionist were 5-point Calvinist. The major problem arises in a misunderstanding of predestination and foreknowledge. So it's easy to see the complexity and confusion which has been debated for hundreds of years. Many "historic" Baptist did indeed believe in an election based on foreknowledge, yet to assume they were all 5-point Calvinist is a gross misinterpretation. Calvinist base their view of election on predestination which is totally different than foreknowledge. Dr E. Y. Mullins held such a view of election based on "**FOREKNOWLEDGE**" but denies every point of Calvinism in his theological discourse, "The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression". In this theological work Dr Mullins describes the nature and responsibility of man concerning the gospel and regarding the subject of election he states:

"God's grace is not irresistible as a physical force is irresistible. Grace is not a physical force. It is a moral and spiritual and personal power."

The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression (E.Y. Mullins pg 344)

Charles Spurgeon is often quoted as an authority or hero concerning the subject of Calvinism, yet Spurgeon embraced a number of other non biblical views such as refusing to be ordained. Charles Spurgeon is a good example, as he declares:

"I believe nothing because Calvin taught it, but because I have found his teaching in the word of God... We hold and assert again and again that the truth which Calvin preached was the very truth which the apostle Paul had long before written in his inspired epistles, and which is most clearly revealed in the discourses of our blessed Lord Himself."

Charles Spurgeon, Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon (American Baptist Society, n.d), 44:398, 47:398.

However, in self contradiction some of what Calvin taught was repugnant to Spurgeon, so much so that he had to pick and choose which of Calvin's views to embrace. In fact, in his later years, Spurgeon often made statements which were in direct conflict to Calvinism. According to Spurgeon, in his favorite sermon and the one through which he said more souls came to Christ than any other, he was criticized as being Arminian.

Theological Snobbery

Another pitfall of the doctrine of Calvinism is that it almost always advertently or inadvertently promotes arrogance. Calvinism often takes on an air of philosophical intellectualism. While education is of the utmost importance the gifts of God are of a spiritual nature. We have already noted the many non scriptural, theological terms that are employed to support the doctrine. Notice as a former Calvinist makes an interesting observation:

“Calvinism is one more illustration of the futility of systematic theology. God's truths, particularly relating to soteriology, are too lofty to be put into concise formulae. The Five Points of Calvinism oversimplify the profound truths of God. They derive their force from proof-texts rather than the general tenor of Scripture. More than that, the doctrines frequently create a spirit of division, elitism and theological snobbery. The system erects walls between believers. It creates a class of Christians within the church general who are supposedly part of a worthy "inner circle."...

But the overarching trend in this tradition - a tradition of which I was once a part - is often one of narrow-mindedness and doctrinal superiority. As we have seen, the Scriptures give no warrant for such bigotry. The average Calvinist may be amazed at just how weak his system is when scrutinized in the light of revealed truth.”

“Calvinism Critiqued” (www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/openhse/calvinism.html)

In conclusion, many who embrace the tenets of reformed theology can easily become caught in a trap of Calvinistic “**determinism**”. While in times past there has been a middle of the road theology among Baptist historians, today's five point Calvinism takes one to an exclusive level which leads to an improper view of God's interaction with his creation. I contend that Calvinism is indeed a contradiction to the general tenor of the scripture and complicates the simple message of salvation.