

## RECONSIDERING CALVINISM PART 6



Though not existing until (almost) 100 years after the Protestant Reformation began, the theological system established at the Synod of Dort<sup>1</sup> - otherwise known as the Doctrines of Grace, Calvinism, the five points of Calvinism, or the acronym, T.U.L.I.P. (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints) serves as an accurate summary of arguably the Reformation's most guarded and novel belief: monergism (God is the only One working/acting in our salvation from its beginning until its end)<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this study has been to re-consider the 5 Points of Calvinism and the monergistic view of salvation it presents through re-examining those biblical texts used to support it along w/the rest of the biblical witness to determine if this view is indeed the gospel of how God saves sinners<sup>3</sup>. Why this study should matter to you: 1) It demonstrates God's continuing protection of us (the denial of free-will and justice espoused by the determinism of the atheist evolutionists is the theology and resulting consequence of Calvinism also known as theistic determinism = God is the cause of all things as all things [comprehensively/exhaustively] including our actions have been pre-determined by Him. Free-will/self-determinism is not a mystery but an illusion. Human beings are robot-victims that were punished as though their actions were self-determined [versus pre-determined/pre-programmed]. Theistic determinism [and its monergistic view of salvation] are said to give God the most glory [?][robot worship versus real worship; e.g. a king whose people praise him b/c they choose to versus a king whose people praise him b/c they are forced to])<sup>4</sup>, 2) It demonstrates growth in our understanding of God's Word and therefore also His continual leading of us as His disciples (Christianity is Judaism 2.0 whereas Calvinism/Protestant Reformation is Roman Catholicism 2.0), 3) It demonstrates our trust/commitment to God's Word as the only sacred cow.

1. TOTAL DEPRAVITY = We are completely unable to repent, believe in Christ and be faithful to God's commands. God must give repentance and faith to us and produce faithfulness for us (thru His work in us – i.e. regeneration/new birth)

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

**MORAL ABILITY** = Though sin has severely affected us, it has not stripped us of our morality – or moral ability before God and others. We can – and therefore are expected to - repent of our sin, respond in faith to the gospel of Christ and live faithfully to God's commands. Countless texts in the Scripture make clear that mankind's will is still free enough to establish both his culpability and God's right to judge him when he fails (we are "w/o excuse" – e.g. Rom 1:18-21 w/2:2, 3:1-8; **Joh 9:41**). Equally evident from the Bible, is God's genuine displeasure when people continue in their rebellion and His desire to see them turn and follow Him (Eze 18:23, 33:11; Deu 30:19-20; Rom 2:4; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 3:9). Both attributes equally imply our ability to repent, believe and be faithful to His commands. Finally, God confirms this ability by explicitly stating that we can obey His commands (Deu 30:11-14). As additional support, the early church rejected the thinking promoted by the doctrine of total depravity (e.g. Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Melito, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Methodius, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom - even Augustine, the coveted saint of the Calvinistic Reformers)<sup>5</sup>.

2. UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION = God brings about conversion in those He chooses to save by changing their will – against their will, (causing them to repent, have faith and produce faithfulness). Since this choice was before Creation, (and human beings possess no ability to repent, have faith or produce faithfulness on their own), it is based on nothing they or anyone else did to afford such favor. Without this pre-creation election by God, you have no chance of ever coming to Christ and being saved. Those however who are chosen, are guaranteed to one day reside in heaven.

What the Bible actually teaches/reveals:

**SEEKER SALVATION** = Though the Bible does teach election, it does NOT teach that God chose/elected specific persons to be the recipients of His salvation before Creation. Nor do the Scriptures teach that such election is unconditional – or that once saved, they are guaranteed to one day reside in heaven. Rather the Scriptures teach that God's election/choice as to who will receive salvation is instead always based/conditioned on the past/present actions of people. Furthermore, God has obligated Himself to all who diligently and genuinely seek Him and His righteousness promising that they will not only find Him, but be elected/chosen to receive His offer of salvation thru covenant relationship w/His Son. Those who obey God's gospel call will be identified as His elect/chosen and those inheriting the blessing of salvation. Such designation however requires that such individuals continue in faithful obedience for the rest of their life. Otherwise such prior election – or identity as the elect, will be forfeited. (Gen 6:5-9, 11-13 w/18a; Gen 6:22 w/7:1; Gen 6:18; 1Pe 3:20-21; Gen 15:1-21; Neh 9:8; Gen 17:1-8 w/21 w/22:16-18 w/26:1-5 w/28:10-15 w/Deu 4:31, 7:6-8; Rom 11:28; Eph 1:1-11; Ezr 8:22; **Isa 56:1-8**; Rom 2:6-8; Act 10:34-35, 13:47-48, **17:25-26**; 1Ti 1:12-13; Act 2:39 w/Gen 17:7-13; 1Co 7:14; Act 8:26-36; Act 16:6-10; Joh 4:23; Mat 9:37-38, 10:12-14; **Isa 56:1-5**; Act 10:34-35, 16:6; Joh 4:23; Rom 2:6-11; Jer 29:13; 2Pe 1:10-11; Mat 24:22, 24, 31; Luk 18:7; Rom 1:6-7, 33, 11:7; 1Co 1:24, 2:7; Col 3:12; 2Ti 2:10; Tit 1:1; 2Jo 1:1, 13; Jud 1:1; Rev 17:14; **Isa 43:20-28**; Joe 2:32; 1Th 1:4 w/3:5; Mat 22:1-14; Deu 7:9-12; 2Pe 1:8-11 w/3:20-22; Rom 11:20-24, 28-29). As additional support, the early church rejected the thinking promoted by the doctrine of unconditional election (e.g. Justin Martyr, Clement, Irenaeus and Hermas).

<sup>1</sup> The Synod of Dort held in Dordrecht, Holland from 1618-1619, consisted of 154 meetings and lasted seven months. Theologians and secular authorities from Germany, Switzerland and England were brought together to examine 5 doctrines made popular by the late seminary professor, Jacobus Arminius. The synod - or council, ultimately disagreed with Arminius' position and in response, crafted 5 counter-points or doctrines that later became known as the "five points of Calvinism" in respect to late reformer, John Calvin.

<sup>2</sup> Monergism is in contrast to what was held in church history prior to that – i.e. synergism, man cooperating w/God (i.e. working/acting together w/God) in the process of his salvation.

<sup>3</sup> The reason I use the words "re-consider" and "re-examine" is b/c Calvinism has been - in whole or part, the conviction of myself and the teaching of our church for over 25 years. I have preached through the 5 points of Calvinism numerous times and received my theological training from Calvinist/Reformed seminaries (e.g. Reformed Theological Seminary).

<sup>4</sup> "The moment we catch sight of the stream of causes that precede their conscious decisions [i.e. criminals], reaching back into their childhood and beyond, their culpability begins to disappear." – Sam Harris (Freewill); "By losing free-will we gain empathy, for we realize that in the end all of us, whether Bernie Madoffs or Nelson Mandelas, are victims of circumstance..." Jerry Coyne (Why We Really Don't Have Free-Will); "When a computer malfunctions, we do not punish it. We track down the problem and fix it, usually by replacing a damaged component, either in hardware or software. Isn't the murderer or the rapist just a machine with a defective component? Why is it that we humans find it almost impossible to accept such conclusions? Why do we vent such visceral hatred on child murderers...when we should simply regard them as faulty units that need fixing or replacing? My dangerous idea is that we shall eventually grow out of all this and even learn to laugh at it, just as we laugh at (a man) when he beats his car." – Richard Dawkins (Let's All Stop Beating Basil's Car).

<sup>5</sup> "He [God] has revealed to us, through His Holy Scriptures, that there is in man a free choice of will... God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards." - Augustine

## **ADDENDUM:**

### **Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 refer to Christ's plan and an ancient book not names of people.**

Two additional texts considered by Calvinists to support their view of election (as God's unconditional choice of people before they existed) are found in (Rev 13:8 and 17:8). Each seem to say that before Creation, people were written (or not written) into God's "book of life" – which according to (Rev 22:15), determines who ends up in heaven and who is "thrown into the lake of fire" (i.e. hell). Upon further analysis however, what comes to light is that the author's (the apostle John's) reference to time is actually in relation to Christ's redemptive plan and the book itself – not people:

1) (Rev 13:8) οὐ γέγραπται (was not written) τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (the name of them) ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς (in the book of life) τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου (of the slain lamb) ἀπὸ (from; same as 17:8) καταβολῆς κόσμου (the foundation of the world)<sup>6</sup>. = Based on the original sentence structure, what is "from the foundation of the world" is Jesus (the "slain lamb"), not the names of people (those missing from God's salvific ledger) (since what is closest is what is most likely being modified). As such, this text is not saying that God chose (or in this case, did not choose) certain people to be saved, before Creation – or irrespective of what they would do once they existed. It is instead communicating something very important about Jesus, that He existed (from the beginning), and that His death as the means to saving and placing people in God's book of life was planned before anything had yet taken place (1Pe 1:17-20).

2) (Rev 17:8) ὧν (whose) οὐ γέγραπται (was not written) τὸ ὄνομα (the name) ἐπὶ (in) τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς (the book of life) ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (from the foundation of the world). = Again, what is being modified by the prepositional phrase, "from the foundation of the world" is not the names of people. It is instead "the book of life". Notice again the sentence structure – what is closest is what is most likely being modified. This ancient book is where God has (from the beginning/"foundation of the world") been writing down the names of those who were appropriately responding to His gospel call and commands as the record which (along w/our deeds) will be reviewed on Judgment Day (Rev 20:12). As further support, consider the fact that Scripture elsewhere speaks of names being added or blotted out (Exo 32:32-33; Deu 29:20; Rev 3:5 w/Act 5:14, 11:24 - "added to the Lord" = This phrase can mean nothing other than added to God's book of life given the previous correlation between Jesus confessing His relationship w/a person and their place in this book – i.e. if He is confessing you it is b/c you were added or remain in the book versus being blotted out). These actions of adding and blotting out only make sense if God's election is conditional and taking place in real-time (versus before time/Creation). In other words, God's work of inserting them in – or taking people out of His book, is being determined by their actions at the time of their life.

## **3. LIMITED ATONEMENT**

**3.1. What the doctrine teaches:** Christ's atoning sacrifice or death was not for all people who have or will ever exist, but limited to specific people, those who God has unconditionally guaranteed will end up in heaven (the Calvinist understanding of the elect). Christ's redemptive work is therefore not only perfectly sufficient, effective for those to whom it is applied, but also perfectly efficient (none was wasted) on those to whom it is applied.

**3.2. The problem with this doctrine:** Though the Bible teaches that Christ's atoning sacrifice or death was not for all people who have or will ever exist, but limited to specific people, those people are not determined based on whether they end up in heaven. Additionally, though Christ's redemptive work is perfectly sufficient and effective for those to whom it is applied, it is not perfectly efficient. Much of His work is wasted on those to whom it is applied.

### **3.2.1. Christ's atoning death was for the Church.**

(Eph 5:25 – "gave Himself up for her") = Jesus' sacrificial death was for the one He loved, the church. Paul communicates the same thing to the Ephesian elders as the reason they were "pay careful attention to ...all of the flock" and "care for the church" (Act 20:28 – "obtained with His own blood") = The church was the object – or people redeemed through Christ's cross-work. Who then are the church? Those who have become its members (or "flock") through baptism (Act 2:41) = Baptism is how people are "added" to the church (or as discussed previously, to the Lord's book of life)<sup>7</sup>. Baptism is also where Christ's blood is initially applied to our lives (Rom 6:3) = To say that we "were baptized into His death" is the equivalent of saying that we have bathed in His blood (See Act 22:16 w/Eph 1:7 and 1Jo 1:7) That Jesus' sacrifice (or blood) was for the Church is equally supported by the other sacrament given to the Church, the Lord's Table. Through it we continue to apply Christ's blood to our lives (Mat 26:28 – "for the forgiveness of sins" w/Jesus' instruction before the Table, Joh 13:1-10 = The purpose of the Table is to continue the cleansing by His blood that we initially bathed in at our baptism). So then, those for whom Christ died (and where His blood is applied) are those (specific) people the Bible identifies as the Church.

### **3.2.2. Paul's use of the term ("flock") in reference to the church (in Act 20:28) means that we have also de-bunked those key texts used by the Calvinists to support this doctrine (Limited Atonement):**

Those texts are: 1) (Joh 10:11 and 15 – "my sheep", 2) (Mat 1:21 – "die for the sins of His people w/Psa 95:7...we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand").

### **3.2.3. Though those in the Church are the elect, these individuals can – as previously discussed - fall away, not only forfeiting their membership (in the Church) and identity (as the elect), but also causing Christ's blood to be wasted.**

Hence the reason, the writer of Hebrews can speak of such individuals as deserving a "worse punishment" come Judgment Day and those who have "outraged the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:26-29) = The apostasy warned against has as its central offense, the damage done to the "blood of the covenant" (meaning the blood of Christ). That which (once) perfectly "sanctified" (i.e. cleansed of sin and justified) these individuals, has now - because of their willful or unrepentant rebellion, been "profaned". IOW: it has been wasted. And according to Jesus, the number representing those individuals is more than those who remain faithful (Mat 22:14, 24:10).

<sup>6</sup> This is the sentence structure in both the Majority Text and Textus Receptus compilations of NT Greek manuscripts. The phrase, "from the foundation of the world" is at the end versus in the middle of the sentence. The KJV and others keep it according to the original, whereas the NAS and ESV change the place of the prepositional phrase (I wonder why?). Giving some credit back to the NAS, they do (at least) provide a footnote indicating their change from the original.

<sup>7</sup> That this verse is indeed referring to the church as the place where people are being added is confirmed by the rest of the book where this same group is identified as "the church" (e.g. Act 5:11, 8:1, 3) or "the church in Jerusalem" (Act 11:22).