

"CALVINISM" EXAMINED BRIEFLY

Questions posed by a strong Calvinist.

1. "Seeking to be 100% consistent with the distinctive message Paul taught, did he teach:

A. "That man is a free moral agent?"

* If man's decisions are not really his, but God's decisions expressed through him, then why is man held accountable for those decisions? How can man be "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20) for his iniquity if he is not able to make his own decisions?

* The ability to make his own decisions does not make him capable of saving himself, or even helping out in the matter. While he is rightly responsible for his decisions, he is not capable of consistently making the right ones due to his old nature (Rom. 8:7, 8).

* Consider an example of the principle that just judgment must be based on true responsibility. When Xerxes (the "Ahasuerus" of the book of Esther) was waging war against Greece he had a bridge built across the Hellespont. When it was completed it was destroyed by a fierce tempest. In rage he commanded that 300 strokes of the scourge be inflicted on the sea, and a pair of fetters be thrown into it at the Hellespont. (See Page 262 in "Explore the Book," by J. Sidlow Baxter). Is God guilty of this same kind of irrational and unjust behavior when He judges men for decisions He, Himself, has made?

B. "That man has a free will?"

* Man's will is not free from strong pressures from both sides:

From Satan (2 Cor. 4:3, 4), from the flesh, family, culture, circumstances, etc. on one hand.

From God, on the other.

-- Through creation (Psa. 19:1 - 6; Rom. 1:19, 20)

-- Through His word (Psa. 19:7 - 14; Rom. 10:17, etc.)

-- Through His Spirit (John 16:8 - 11)

* But man is, nevertheless, held responsible for his decisions! (Acts 2:23).

* Rom. 8:8 tells us that those in the flesh cannot please God. So, if believing God pleases Him (in the sense of a good work done), does this mean that one cannot believe until he is no longer in the flesh? This would place salvation before believing.

* John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Compare verses 39 and 40. In verse 39 the universality is in connection with **things** (neuter gender), while in verse 40, where **people** are involved, it is those who see the Son and believe who are to be raised up.

* John 6:44, 45 indicate that God draws men through His word. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." Compare Rom. 10:17.

C. "That doctrine is not important?"

* Of course doctrine is important! However he did teach that some doctrines were to be reserved for those who were spiritually ready to receive them (1 Cor.2:2, 6, 7 and following).

* He specifies that the truth should be taught in love (Eph. 4:15), patiently (2 Tim. 2:24), and with gentleness, looking to God to lead others to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25).

D. "That God did not destine us to salvation?"

* No, but neither did he clearly teach that there was no basis, aside from God's arbitrary choice, for choosing us -- or that those not chosen had no valid offer of salvation.

* His election was:

According to His foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). The verb "foreknow" (*proginosko*) is found in Acts. 26:5; Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20 ("foreordained" is "foreknown" in NASB); 2 Pet. 3:17. The noun foreknowledge" (*prognosis*) is found in Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2.

In Christ (Eph. 1:4).

Through sanctification and faith in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

E. "That part is by man and part by God?"

Our salvation is all God's work and not due to any work of man. However, faith is NOT a work!

* Rom. 4:16, "It is by faith that it might be in accordance with grace." That is, faith is the **only** thing God could require of man which would **not** be a **work**.

* Rom. 4:5. "But to the one who does **not work** but **believes**, his faith is counted for righteousness." If faith is a work then this verse is saying, "But to the one who **does not work**, but **works** --."

* Eph. 2:8, 9. This passage does not say "by **faith** you are saved," but "by **grace** you are saved **through** faith." The grace is set forth in 2 Cor. 8:9 and 5:21 and is all God's work. It is through faith since man can only release the power of God to save him by believing God has done it all.

* John 6:28, 29. "What must we **do**, that we may **work** the **works** of God?" "This is the **work** of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent." Does this prove that faith is a work? Compare Acts 16:30, 31, where the keeper of the prison asked, "What must I **do** to be saved?" and Paul answered, "**Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ --." Both Christ and Paul were saying, "What you must **do** is to **stop doing** and **believe**."

2. "Questions awaiting an answer:

A. Who's going to decide what's important?"

While every revealed truth is important, they do not all have the same importance. For instance, it is true (as we understand it) that the church did not begin at Pentecost, but that is not as important (and not as clearly revealed) as that Christ died for our sins. While the former truth is important to a clear understanding of God's program -- the latter is totally essential to the saving of the soul!

* There were glorious truths (which had to do with the mystery -- 1 Cor. 2:7) which Paul with-held until the believers involved were mature enough to handle them (1 Cor. 2:2, 6).

- * Paul summarized the essential truths as "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).
- * Generally, the more important a truth is the greater place we would expect it to have in Scripture. While one verse, when understood dispensationally and in light of context and other Scripture, is sufficient to establish a truth, it does not necessarily indicate the vital importance of that truth.
- * A **truth** is important, but must be clearly a revealed truth and not merely a doctrinal position based on men's interpretation (no matter how logical) of Scripture.
- * A truth takes on added importance when it is needed to combat heresy.
- B. "Who's going to decide what's profitable?"**
Paul answers that! "**All Scripture** is inspired by God and **is profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). However, some types of discussion may be unprofitable (2 Tim. 2:14 - 19).
- C. "Where in Scripture does it say that we should avoid things that only gender questions? The disciples were always questioning Christ's statements."**
-- 2 Tim. 2:14, 16 - 18.
- D. "Where does it say debate is unprofitable? Read Acts 15:1 - 15. Verse 2 -- great dissension and debate. Verse 7 -- much debate."**
See "Conflicts in Christian work" -- Appendix # 3 in the Class Notes on Acts (<\clasnot\ntestmt\actse.sam> on computer).

3. "Further questions:

- A. Where in Scripture does it say that the exposure of error is of no real edification?"**
Proclaiming truth is primary, exposing error is secondary -- but often necessary (Jude 3).
- B. "Are we to be 'Built up' in ourselves or in Christ?"**
In Christ, of course.
- C. "If we are living for the Lord should we not defend His truth, His glory, and expose false teaching and doctrines of men?"**
Of course -- including that portion of the teaching of both Calvinists and Arminians which is false, for neither group is fully free from "doctrines of men."
- D. "Why defend the glory of man and the doctrine of man?"**
There is no reason to do so, of course.
- E. "How does godliness come, by the work of the flesh or by the Holy Spirit?"**
By the work of the Holy Spirit using His Word, of course. Three chapters in Romans (chapters six through eight) are taken up with this theme, to say nothing of many other passages.

4. "We are to preserve:

- A. The 'unity of the Spirit.' It is not trying to unite all the different spirits that are in Christianity."**
Of course not. The unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) is an absolute unity revealed by the Holy Spirit which we cannot produce nor perpetuate. We can only recognize it and, "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love," endeavor to keep it in the bond of peace. We cannot produce

"one God" or "one Spirit" or "one Body," etc, but we can, and should, keep these great unities in view in our relationship with God and other believers.

B. "The 'unity of the faith,' is not trying to unite all the faiths."

Of course not. It is that practical unity of doctrine and practice which is brought about by the Spirit's work in us and through us as we "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). We will never fully attain this unity, but it should be our goal.

OTHER RANDOM CONSIDERATIONS

* See "Balance of Truth" -- Bible Study # 51. ("--\amipro\docs\bibstudy\baltruth.sam.")

* Consider the fact that there is a great area of truth which has not been revealed, where we must stand in awe of God and His ways and trust Him, believing what He has revealed, whether we can understand it or not; whether we can "harmonize" it or not.

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Deut. 29:29

"He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him." Dan 2:22.

* Paul spends three chapters in Romans (9 -- 11) discussing God's sovereignty in relation to Israel and this age of grace. These chapters contain some very difficult, and too often misunderstood, passages. Near the end of chapter eleven Paul summarizes what he has been saying and reveals that it is God's dealings dispensationally that have been the topic. It is very significant that Paul closes this section with a "doxology" concerning man's inability to fully understand God and His ways, and the futility of trying to read God's mind:

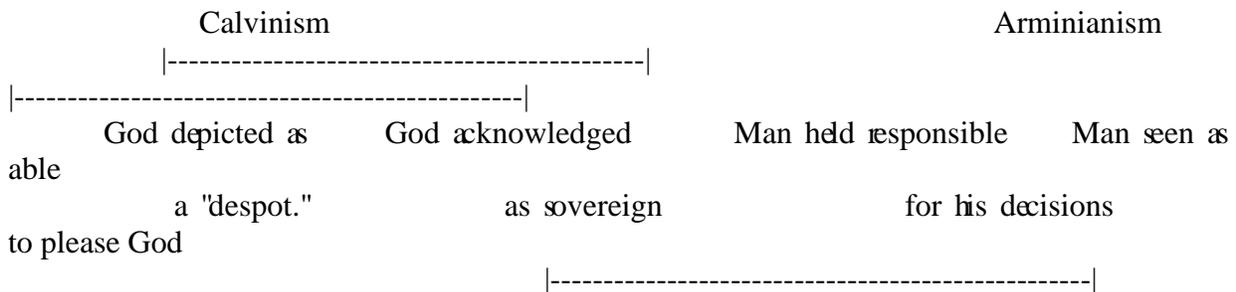
"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?

"Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:33 - 36 -- NKJV).

* Since Paul warns us about being followers of men (in the early chapters of First Corinthians) it seems that we should not identify too closely with any man's theology, but "search the Scriptures whether these things are so." Both Calvin and Arminius had much truth -- but neither was free from error. It seems that we should seek, as much as possible, to be "Scripturalists" rather than either Calvinists or Arminians. Even among Calvinists and Arminians there are differences in just how far they go in their views. There are both moderate and extreme views in both groups. See the diagram below.



Scriptural view

Two "Tulips"

Calvin's "Tulip."

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

Heath's "Tulip."

Total Recognition of All of God's Attributes
Universal Provision for Man's Need
Limited Application of God's Provision
Inconceivable Grace
Perseverance of the Savior

--- William P Heath, -- Bible Study # 58.

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