

MY OBJECTIONS TO CALVINISM

by Daniel Merritt

When studying the Bible there are certain truths that are not debatable. That Christ was born of a virgin, that He lived a sinless life, that His death on the cross was the sufficient sacrifice for our sins, that He bodily arose from the dead and that He is coming again – those are five truths or doctrines to which there can be no debate. Those truths are the cornerstone of the Christian faith. However, there are some doctrines upon which good men debate and disagree. One such disagreement comes in regards to how Christians view Calvinism, which has had resurgence in many Southern Baptist churches in recent years. Calvinism holds to the position that God decrees that a certain number of persons, known only to Him, receive eternal life without respect to their foreseen faith and these persons, and these alone, shall be saved. All other persons are condemned to eternal judgment without respect to their foreseen unbelief. Such teaching can create much tension and debate among those seeking to understand its theological perspective in regard to salvation. Before seeking to tackle this subject let's look at a brief overview of what Calvinism teaches.

Calvinism derives its name from John Calvin, a French theologian, who lived from 1509-1564. The five-points of Calvinism are summarized by the acronym T-U-L-I-P. (1) T stands for the Total Depravity (sinfulness) of man; therefore, man is unable to come to Christ by his own will. (2) U stands for Unconditional Election. God elects some to salvation based solely on His sovereign choice and man has no choice in the matter nor is he able to make a choice. (3) L stands for Limited Atonement. Christ only died for those God has elected to salvation and His death does not apply to those not elected. (4) I stands for Irresistible Grace. Irresistible grace contends that when God calls the elect to salvation they cannot resist or reject Christ irrespective of their will. (5) P stands for Perseverance of the saints. Perseverance of the saints means a person who has been elected by God will persevere in salvation until the end and cannot ultimately be lost.

It is not my intention to comment on all five-points of Calvinism, but to present 38 inconsistencies and objections to Calvinism's most controversial belief that some individuals are elected or predestined to salvation while others are predestined to eternal damnation and that Christ's death on the cross was limited and His atonement was not on behalf of all humanity. There are Calvinists who argue Calvin didn't hold to such a position (double predestination), but listen to his own words, "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself, what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny: but eternal life is foreordained for some, and

eternal damnation for others. For every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to death" (Calvin's, *Institutes*, 3:21:5).

I contend such divine deterministic teaching of election is inconsistent biblically and woefully flawed. I realize a discussion on election is no easy subject to digest and requires answers that take time to ponder. As well, it is realized that there can be passionate disagreement when writing on this issue and that is ok. But I can assure you that my objections to Calvinism are the result of many years of studying scripture that have been bathed in prayer. While there will always be a mystery when it comes to the doctrine of election, we must always look within the boundaries of faith and scriptures for the answers and we must always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the Predestined One.

My objections to Calvinism, that God decreed, predetermined and predestinated from eternity past before anyone was born, before anyone did good or evil, irrespective of one's decision, that some would go to heaven and others would go to hell, are...

1. I object to Calvinism because it contends the starting point in the doctrine of election is God's eternal decree and not Jesus Christ. According to Calvin, one's election to salvation or damnation began by an "eternal decree" before creation (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:21:5). If an eternal decree is the starting point of election, and not Christ, then Christ is merely an instrument for carrying the decree out. P.T. Forsyth (1848-1921) writes, "[Christ] has no greater status than an engine of God who executes God's will. It is bound to make Christ superfluous [unnecessary] once the decrees have been executed and the end is reached" (Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future*, 277).

When one moves divine decrees as the starting point of election and not Christ, there is a tear in the seam of biblical revelation. Christ is the eternal thread woven into the fabric of divine revelation that binds ALL biblical truth tightly together. As the eternal "Word," who was with God and was God in the beginning, as the divine Reason and Revelation, there cannot be a higher cause of election than Jesus Christ.

Calvinism contends God first elected those who would be saved and then He appointed Christ to become the Redeemer of those who He predestinated to salvation. Such an order creates difficulties. Christ must be the starting point of one's theology. If persons were elected to salvation before the appointment of Christ as their Savior, then there must be a prior cause for election other than Jesus Christ, which would result in one's election being outside of Christ not in

Christ. This is not possible as the Bible says in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Bible records in Colossians, "*For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him: and He is before all things and by him all things consist*" (Colossians 1:16-17).

"He is before ALL Things." This means that before a decree to elect, there was/is Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, the Elect One. And it is "in Him" all things consist, not outside of Him or prior to Him. Nothing was prior to Christ; therefore, a decree to elect persons to salvation was not prior to the appointment of Christ as Calvinism contends. Christ being the Eternal Word from the beginning means that before any decree of election there stands Jesus Christ towering over eternity, in which nothing was planned or chosen before Him.

Christ is the grounds and starting point for God's actions. The starting point in divine election is not in a decree but in a Person, in an Act, the Act of the Christ of the Cross. Divine Election is in Christ, and nothing is elected outside of or prior to Him. God justifies on the grounds of the perfect life, perfect obedience, and perfect sacrifice on the cross of Jesus Christ, foreknown in eternity past. So God elects on the grounds of the perfect work of Christ. This is not just election on the bases of one's foreseen faith and trust in Christ, but it is election based on the Holy Father foreknowing the perfect life and finished work of Christ on the cross.

2. I object to Calvinism because it renders the invitation of "whosoever will may come" (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17) meaningless and just an illusion. It is an illusion and an invalid invitation as those not elected to salvation were created not to respond; therefore "whosoever will may come" is not a genuine invitation seeing they were created not to be saved and don't have the ability to answer God's call to salvation.

3. I object to Calvinism for how can those not chosen for salvation be held responsible for rejecting Christ since they were intentionally created by God not to be able to respond to Christ and were created for judgment? It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment (Heb. 9:27), but if Calvinism be true how can one be held responsible for being purposely created not to receive Christ and were created for no other reason than to manifest God's power and justice?

Randolph S. Foster (1820-1903) says it well, "In the name of Christianity, I protest against a principle involving such blasphemy. It is impossible that the everlasting God should be remotely liable, by any thing he has done, by anything discoverable in his works, by any revelations he has made, either of his character or plans to such an accusation. The glorious Ruler of the universe, what blasphemy of his blessed name can equal this for enormity, to charge that, for the glory of his

sovereignty, and to manifest his power, he is now damming millions of helpless creatures in hell forever, for no cause but doing precisely what they were compelled to do and what they could not possibly avoid" (Foster, *Calvinism*, 54-55).

God's power and justice (and holy-love) are revealed and manifested in the Christ of the cross and His resurrection, not in intentionally creating persons to be damned for eternity.

4. I object to Calvinism for God's command for us to love all people (Mark 12:30-31), which He himself does not do by purposely and intentionally creating individuals to eternal torment with no choice to be saved, holds man to a higher standard than He Himself adheres to. The nature of the God of Calvinism is contradictory to the nature of the God of the Bible which states, "God is Love" (I John 4:8). And His Love is universal as He loves the whole world and all the "whosoever" in the world (John 3:16).

5. I object to Calvinism for God's predestination of some to salvation and condemnation of others, irrespective of the fact that all are equally sinful before a holy God and before anyone does good or bad, means He is a respecter of persons when electing one over the other. That God would deliberately decree before creation to withhold the means for effecting salvation in someone knowing that by doing so they would go to hell is unthinkable. Such a notion clearly contradicts what the Bible says about Him being no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; James 2:1-13).

6. I object to Calvinism as it means God arbitrarily decides who will be saved and who will be condemned without consideration of future demerits or merits on the part of the individual. Such a view, which was declared heretical by early church councils, contradicts the teaching of Scripture, the love, justice and holiness of God and, as well, the freedom of man. While the Bible clearly teaches one's eternal destiny is determined by one's acceptance or rejection of Christ, yet Calvin contended that a person's eternal destiny was decided by divine "eeny-meeny-miny-moe." He wrote, "Whom God passed by, therefore, he reprobates and *from no other cause* than his determination to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his children" (*Institutes*, Vol. II, 163).

English theologian Daniel Whitby (1638-1720) comments on the arbitrariness of God espoused by Calvin, "So that as in two apples of equal goodness [or badness], no reason can be given why I should chose one, rather than the other; so neither can any reason be assigned why all or any of these persons are thus elected to salvation, rather than all or any that are not elected" (Whitby, *Discourse on Calvinism*, 58).

Man's salvation, according to Scripture, is not based on God's groundless arbitrariness, but on man's acceptance or rejection of the Christ of the Cross. God's predestination/election, according to Romans 8:29-30, is anchored in His foreknowledge of one's acceptance or rejection of Christ; it is based on one's foreseen faith or lack of faith.

7. I object to Calvinism for it contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible that Jesus died for ALL our sins and tasted death for EVERY man (John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9; I John 2:2). The Bible proclaims that God was in Christ reconciling the "world" unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). However, most Calvinist confessions of faith declare, "Christ died exclusively for the elect, and purchased redemption for them alone, in other words, Christ made atonement only for the elect and in no sense did he die for the rest of the race" (*From Exposition on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Section IV). If some are elected to heaven and others to judgment then the multitude of verses declaring that Christ went to the cross for "the world" and gave Himself a Sacrifice for all humanity are false statements. I will take the declaration of John the Baptist over that of John Calvin, "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

8. I object to Calvinism because its teaching that God's election of some to salvation and condemnation of others contradicts His own benevolent and longsuffering nature and will - -- that being that He is loving and longsuffering not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The Calvinist would say, "If it is God's will that all be saved then all would be saved." John Davenant (1572-1641) comments on 2 Peter 3:9, "There is in God a true will revealed in the gospel, of saving all men that shall believe, and a true will liking, embracing, and rewarding faith, holiness and perseverance, in all men whatsoever without distinction of persons...And when the Apostle says, 'God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,' the meaning is His perfect will is that all men be saved but His permissive will allows men to believe or not believe in Christ; if that be not so the call for 'all' to come to repentance is invalid and in vain" (Whitby, *Discourse on Calvinism*, 83).

9. I object to Calvinism for it means God deludes men with vain words when He commands all men to repent and turn to Him (Acts 17:30)? If God created some not to be able to do so, they cannot obey that which He commanded. The Bible says that God can not lie (Numbers 23:19; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2), which means God would not delude someone with a vain command if it were impossible for them to respond to it.

10. I object to Calvinism for it means if God elects individuals to salvation it also means He predestines others to be eternally damned, which would destroy all sense

of obligation and sense of responsibility on the part of individuals and creates indifference. Since, as Calvin taught, "God, from eternity, freely and unchangeably decreed whatsoever comes to pass," why would anyone seek to change or reform seeing the destiny of their lives is already predetermined, fixed and cannot be altered? Seeing one's fate is unchangeable why should a person bother to change seeing their fate is fixed? Why should a person ever regret anything they do seeing their actions were created in eternity past and they had no ability to do otherwise. Again, such convoluted logic defies sensibilities and contradicts the biblical commands for all men to repent and turn from their sinful ways.

11. I object to Calvinism for it means God decreed certain persons to be saved, which implies that God in turn decreed the judgment of others. God's judgment doesn't have to be decreed, as His judgment is the natural reaction of holiness' opposition to sin. Since God is holy His divine wrath is the natural response of His holiness to sin. The reaction of holiness to sin is to oppose it and judge it; holiness condemning sin naturally flows from the nature of our God who is holy. To say that God decrees judgment implies that judgment is something that is outside of Himself rather than flowing from the Holy nature of who He is. Holiness is not something God does, holiness is who God is for God IS thrice holy (Isaiah 6:1-2), therefore, His opposition to sin and His judgment upon sin doesn't have to be decreed. And we see holiness judging sin on the cross, for on the cross our holy God made Christ "to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Holiness dealt with sin not in a decree but in the cross.

12. I object to Calvinism for it means the election of some individuals to salvation was decreed in eternity past, which Calvinism would say such a decree was for the purpose to glorify His love. To decree divine love implies that love is something outside of the nature of who God is. God doesn't have to decree love for God is love (I John 4:8). Love is not something outside of who God is, but love flows from His very nature and He demonstrated His holy-love not by a decree, but He demonstrated "His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). It is in the cross, not in a decree, the Elect Man, Jesus Christ, glorified the Father and it is as we embrace the Son we, too, glorify the Father.

13. I object to Calvinism for it clashes with the biblical teaching that Christ is the Elect One (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:14-18; I Peter 1:6) and that ALL who embrace Him in faith are members of the Church, the Elect Lady (2 John 1) by virtue of their faith in the Elect One, Jesus Christ. The elect, then, are those who are members of the Church of Christ, of which they become a member by faith in the Elect Man. It is at the cross Christ is both the accepted Son and the rejected sinner. He was rejected because as our Substitute He bore our sins, He was the accepted Son

because He knew no sin. And it is as we embrace Him we become accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6).

14. I object to Calvinism for it means the non-elect have no sufficient means, will or ability to turn from their sins and escape from damnation; therefore, how can they be held accountable for their works since they were created to be incapable of altering their course of actions and accepting Christ. The Bible teaches that one is held accountable "according to what they had done" (Matt 12:36; Rev. 20:11-15) and are lost because of refusal to accept Christ not that they were created not to accept Christ.

15. I object to Calvinism that God purposely predestines many to be eternally damned for His own glory and pleasure, this contradicting what the Bible states that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ez. 18:23). It goes against all sensibilities to imagine that God would eternally condemn persons, who He intentionally created to be unable to respond to His command to repent, and He did so for His own pleasure. Such a doctrine is revolting and pictures a monstrous Being who would actually create persons for the sole purpose of condemning them to hell. But that is the God of Calvinism, while the God of the Bible takes no pleasure in the death of those who do not turn to Him to live (Ez. 18:23).

16. I object to Calvinism for it would be a continued act of cruelty on the part of God to let people continue to be born knowing that some of them have beforehand already been intentionally destined to go to hell and have no choice in the matter. Such thinking about God and a view of God in those terms is unimaginable.

17. I object to Calvinism for it means man is a mere pawn in a heavenly chess match with no will of his own and how can he be held accountable for sinful and wicked choices that have been predetermined. In Calvinism man is no more than a machine or a puppet on a string who has been programmed or decreed to act in a certain way and whose eternal destiny cannot be reversed.

18. I object to Calvinism for it means God decrees that people do what He forbids - He creates people to violate His commandments and then condemns them for violating what He created them to do. There is no contradiction in God's nature. God's holiness will not allow Him to violate His own righteous and perfect nature, for to do so renders His holy nature less than holy.

19. I object to Calvinism for it is contrary to the desire of the divine nature that all men freely love and obey him. That some are elected to "love" God is only false love because love must be given freely to be true love. Love cannot be coerced it must be freely given. Love and coercion are not compatible. Love is not real love if

we are programmed to give it. If one doesn't express love freely and willingly then it is not love.

20. I object to Calvinism for it means God has predetermined some to be lost and their sins condemned, implying that God preordained them to sin which would make God the author of their sins. Calvin himself said, "Nothing can happen but which is decreed by His will" (*Institutes*, I, xiii, iii). Does that include evil as well? Yes it does. This, of course, contradicts the Bible which says God is not the author of sin (James 1:13).

Calvinists can at times be illogically complex in their explanations that God decreed even the wicked. Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), echoed Calvin's belief that God decrees all things, wrote, "Though God may be said to be author of all the actions done by the wicked, yet he is not the author of them...but powerfully excites them to action and withholds those gracious influences of his Spirit without which every action is necessarily evil.... God may, therefore, be the author of all [their] actions and yet not be the author of evil" (Toplady, *On Predestination*, 54-56).

Now how can God decree the actions of the wicked yet He not be the author of their evil? If all things are decreed by God was not even the intention to commit an evil act decreed by God? If the answer is "no" then something happened that wasn't decreed by God. If you answer is "yes" even the intention to do evil by the wicked doer was decreed by God making God the author of his sin, for you cannot separate the intention to sin from the act of sinning. If God did not decree both the intent to sin and the act of sin then something took place before time that was not decreed, which Calvinism insists didn't happen. No matter what convoluted words the Calvinist uses to explain this conundrum their reasoning makes God the author of sin. This clearly contradicts the Bible which states that God cannot sin neither is He the author of sin (James 1:13; Habakkuk 1:13).

21. I object to Calvinism for if God pre-determines man's sin through no choice of his own, which means Jesus is the remedy for a problem that God Himself purposely and intentionally created! To hold the position that God purposely created sin and created man to intentionally sin with no way to alter his course of action would make God the cause and the source of all sin and impurity. Such thinking is an insult to the purity and holiness of God.

22. I object to Calvinism for not only does it mean the election of some individuals to salvation, it also means God ordained that certain other persons should be unholy, unrighteous, and disobedient to Him. It is inconceivable and unbiblical that God would have decreed that the greater part of humanity should be left incapable

of responding in a way that He desires, which is that all men should freely respond by loving, honoring, fearing and obeying Him.

Now the Calvinist argues that is better that some be saved than no one at all. They contend, "Has not God the right to extend mercy to some without Him being obligated to extend salvation to others? After all, all deserve judgment, no one deserves salvation, but in Him saving some he is extending mercy which he didn't have to extend at all." I will let Randolph S. Foster answer this contention, "I am familiar with this eloquent argument on this point, but it falls powerless upon my mind for this reason. How came these miserable creatures in their condition of sin and wretchedness? You must answer me; they were put there by the decree of God. First, he put them all in the consequences of the fall, that he might have an occasion to display his grace, in saving some, and to glorify his justice in damning others! He made them sinners, that he might have a pretense to torment them forever, to the glory of his sovereign justice. If you can reconcile this to justice, I should be happy to have the benefit of your assistance" (*Calvinism*, 82). I could not have said it better myself!

23. I object to Calvinism because, if both the saved and lost are preordained to glorify God in either judgment or salvation, then it is a false glorification.

Glorification that is not given freely is manipulation and is not real. If God has to make someone glorify Him then in reality it is glorification that has no real value as it has to be coerced. The Calvinist will say, "In the election of those whom God has chosen to salvation He decreed to glorify His mercy and grace, and in those who are not elected He decreed the glorification of His justice and sovereignty in their damnation and judgment. These are the two great ends of God in these decrees." A God that has to seek glory by compulsion and coercion and is willing to send persons to eternal damnation to receive such glory strikes at the heart of human sensibilities and paints a picture of a God that strikes terror in one's heart not free and loving obedience which the Bible teaches God desires.

As was stated in objection # 3, God's power and justice (and holy-love) are revealed and manifested in the Christ of the cross and His resurrection, not in intentionally creating persons to be damned for eternity.

24. I object to Calvinism for, if God purposely created someone with the sole intent of sending them to the horrors of eternal damnation and He knowing the awfulness of hell that awaits them and He intentionally and continually creates persons for that purpose anyway, then such a God is reduced to a sadistic and cruel Being. Such a notion is unbiblical, against common sense, and makes such a God no better than a vicious pagan god not worthy of allegiance. How can a God of love create someone intentionally predestining them to eternal torment? Such a picture of God is unthinkable and goes against everything the Bible teaches about a loving God.

25. I object to Calvinism because God is reduced to being distinguishable from the devil's purpose only by quantity. The only difference is in their quantitative character, the devil wants everyone to go to hell and God purposely and intentionally predestines only some (many) to go to hell. Such a view of God is morally abhorrent. The Bible clearly teaches that the devil came to kill, steal and destroy but that Christ came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Whitby writes, "It cannot be thought without horror that He, who is the Lover of souls, should appoint any, much less the greater part of them, to inevitable perdition before they had a being" (Whitby, *Discourse on Calvinism*, 70).

26. I object to Calvinism because Christ's confession of God's holiness in the midst of sins judgment for all humanity is negated, as His death on the cross and the offer of salvation is reduced to a selected group of individuals and not for the world (John 3:16; I John 2:2). It was all humanity that owed confession to the holiness of God and it was the sins of all humanity that had to be atoned for not just a selected few.

Forsyth rightly states, "The need for satisfaction for God's wounded holiness can only be met by a personal holiness upon the scale of the human race, upon the universal scale of the sinful race. Anything less would be insufficient. What Christ presented to God on the cross was therefore not the perfect obedience of a saintly unit [as Calvinism teaches] but a perfect racial [universal] obedience" (Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, 126-129). One's individual salvation is the result of one's personal faith in the provision of what God did for ALL humanity, what He did for the WHOLE of humanity.

27. I object to Calvinism for it renders our lives as simply a movie where the characters don't deviate from the script and we have no control over altering the outcome. Since every thought and action of man is predestined in regard to whether or not they are saved, implying individuals have no control over their choices.

28. I object to Calvinism for it reduces salvation to a condition not a relationship. A relationship is developed by the free consent of those involved. If deterministic election is true one does not have a "relationship" by free consent but by force, by compulsion. That is not a relationship but a condition.

29. I object to Calvinism for it creates spiritual pride and elitism in those who "happen" to be part of the elect. Those who teach deterministic election always just "happen" to be one of those who were selected for salvation and exhibit an air of spiritual arrogance that they are part of the select few. I have never met anyone who believed in deterministic election who wasn't one of the elect! James tells us

God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Salvation is not a gift that should create pride but humility. One is humbled that God loved humanity enough to become a man and dwell among us and by His life and death provides salvation to ALL who will respond to His offer to believe. His work on the cross is an offer extended to all, creating thankfulness not spiritual elitism.

30. I object to Calvinism for in God's intentionally creating some people to go to hell, the words love and goodness are words that are not compatible to either the Bible's revelation of love and goodness or our best ideas of what love and goodness mean. The biblical words love and goodness are not compatible with the love and goodness associated with individualistic deterministic predestination.

31. I object to Calvinism for it hinders the fervor to evangelize since it is already decided who will be saved and who isn't. Since whoever is going to be saved is already predestined regardless of what man does it makes evangelization a mute point.

32. I object to Calvinism for it raises the question "why pray" for the salvation of someone. Since the elect have been predestined and since they will be saved regardless of what man does or doesn't do it renders praying a futile exercise. As well, why pray for the lost as God has decreed that they cannot, will not and have not the ability to accept Christ no matter how much we pray for them.

33. I object to Calvinism for then all the exhortations, warnings and urgings found in the New Testament to believe on Jesus and be saved are in vain, delusory and make no sense. If God has already predetermined who will enter heaven and who will suffer eternal judgment irrespective of one's decision, the Bible's urging to accept Christ is deceptive seeing the decision has already been determined.

34. I object to Calvinism because it limits God's sovereignty. There is no question that God is sovereign, that He has authority and power over all of His creation. God's sovereignty means that nothing can stop God's purposes from being fulfilled. Calvinists, it seems to me, limit God's sovereignty by seeking to protect it. Bill Crouse expresses the Calvinist view of God's sovereignty, writing:

If God's sovereignty is limited in any way it is conceivable that something could happen apart from divine permission. It would mean that something or someone is outside of His sovereignty and could therefore thwart His plans. It would mean that God is finite and would have all the weaknesses of the Greek and Roman gods. If there are any atomic particles that are outside of God's jurisdiction we would have not guarantee that God could keep His

promises (Crouse, "Divine Election and Predestination," Christian Information Ministries (C.I.M.), #56).

If God is sovereign and omnipotent is there anything that can "thwart His plans," whether He directly planned it or gave His permission for man to make a free choice? While one must recognize there will always be a mystery and tension between God's sovereignty and man's free will, is God so limited in His power that He can't overcome the sinful choices of man? Is God fearful that some "atomic particles" might prevent Him from keeping His promises that He predestines everything without the possibility of it ever acting outside of a mechanical foreordination? If the answer to those questions is "yes" then God's power is limited by His own sovereignty.

God is without question sovereign, yet would not God's power and sovereignty be greater displayed by actually overcoming challenges to Him rather than Him creating everything to respond robotically to Him? Theologian P.T. Forsyth points out that because God is sovereign and omnipotent He is capable of limiting His own sovereignty and omnipotence! One is truly sovereign and omnipotent who can limit their own sovereignty and omnipotence when it comes to dealing with humanity through the Christ of the Cross allowing man the freedom to make a decision for or against Christ. Southern Baptist theologian Dale Moody (1915-1992) writes, "God is sovereign in his rule over the final outcome of history, but that does not deny the freedom of man to make his own decisions even to his own destruction" (Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 338).

Roger E. Olson, professor at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, echoes Moody's thoughts, writing, "Saying we have free will to resist and even [reject Christ] does not diminish the greatness of God's sovereignty and power *because* our ability to resist and thwart God's perfect will is given us by God for the sake of having real relationships with us, not artificial ones. Yes, of course, God *could* control us. But he doesn't. Not because we have some power *over him* but because he wants us to love him and obey him freely and not by compulsion" (Olson, *What's Wrong with Calvinism?*, www.patheos.com).

The cross is proof that nothing, anything or anybody can stop the plan of God. In spite of the worst sin could do to the Son of God He overcame the combined evil of man, the devil and death. The cross and the resurrection are testimony to the truth that not even one "atomic particle" can ever successfully stop God's purposes from being perfectly fulfilled.

35. I object to Calvinism because it destroys the moral government of God on the earth and depicts God's sovereignty as tyrannical sovereignty. In Calvinism man is

not dealt with according to his moral deeds or according to his acceptance or rejection of Christ, he is dealt with irrespective of his foreseen deeds whether morally good or bad. He is dealt with on the basis that God elected some to eternal bliss and some to eternal damnation without respect to any deeds they have done. Man is not dealt with according to his moral conduct and character but whether or not God has predestined him to heaven or hell. There then is no moral government on the earth as everything is already decreed for each individual as to how they will live and where they will spend eternity and God's sovereignty is a tyrannical rule that leaves man no choice in the matter how he will morally conduct himself. Such thinking goes against all logic and sensibilities.

36. I object to Calvinism because it teaches regeneration or the new birth precedes faith. The Calvinist reasons that since man has no free will due to his depravity that he must first be born again in order that he can believe. W.G.T. Shedd writes, "A man is not regenerated because he first believes in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated" (Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 509). John Cheesman states, "[Man] must be born again before he can repent and believe" (Cheesman, *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, "Chapter Six – Another Gospel," The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971). Augustus Strong, as well, expresses thoughts that regeneration must occur before one can obey to repent and believe (Strong, *Systemic Theology*, 835).

This clearly reverses the order that is taught in Scripture. When one reads John 3 and Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, the Master Teacher tells the religious "ruler of the Jews" (Jh 3:1) that for one to experience the New Birth they must believe on the Son whom God has sent into the world (Jh 3:14-18). It is clear from the words of Jesus the New Birth is the result of one believing in Christ, not one experiencing the New Birth in order to believe. Paul told the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Again, it is clear that one is saved by believing first, not first regenerated so one can believe.

Many more verses could be given that show belief in Christ comes before being born again, that being born again is the result of first believing. The Calvinist arrives at the position that one must be regenerated before they can believe by logic rather than by the revelation of the Word. And there are several difficulties that present themselves when one says regeneration comes before believing: (1) Paul says God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5) not those who have already been born again. If one is first born again in order to believe then it becomes justification of the reborn not the ungodly. (2) If a person is already born again before they are justified by faith, then believing is a mechanical formality that has little meaning. (3) The Bible says faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), but according to the Calvinist regeneration comes before the hearing of the Word or

faith. The Holy Spirit comes to a person in the preaching of the Word of God, not apart from it.

Calvinism goes beyond biblical revelation in its contending that a person is regenerated before they repent and believe. To reverse the order is misleading and scripturally erroneous.

Now the Calvinist will ask, "How, then, is a person dead in trespasses and sins enabled to receive Christ without being regenerated first? Arminius writes, "This is effected by the Word of God. But persuasion is effected, externally by the preaching of the word, internally by the operation, or rather the co-operation, of the Holy Spirit. Tending to this result, that the Word may be understood and apprehended by true faith" (Arminius, "A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius," *Works*, III, 334). Arminius contends that when the preaching of the Word of God is accompanied by the Lord's preceding or prevenient grace, which is able to awaken the spiritually dead, influencing the will of sinful men and swaying them to receive the gift of salvation through faith.

37. I object to Calvinism because it renders the tears of Jesus as He wept over Jerusalem as hypocritical and insincere. Luke records that as Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, "He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation'" (Luke 19:41-44).

Luke tells us Jesus wept because the people had neglected and failed to recognize their opportunity. He wept because of their sin. He wept because of their blindness as the result of their refusal to see. He wept because of what sin had done to them and the fate that awaited them. Now why would Jesus have wept if they had been created not to have been able to have chosen "the things that make for your peace" (Lk 19:42)? If Jesus knew they had been purposely created and elected to suffer eternal judgment then why bother to weep and mourn over their spiritual blindness, which was not the result of their refusal to see, but was as a state they were purposely created to be in. If they were created to reject Christ then the tears of Jesus over their lost condition were in vain and shed in opposition to God's eternal decree to doom them. The tears of Christ would be hypocritical and insincere if He knew they never had a chance to experience "the things that make for their peace."

38. I object to Calvinism for it contradicts the message the angel proclaimed to the shepherds on that first Christmas night that the coming of Christ was "Good News" to "all people" (Luke 2:10). In Calvinism the message of Christ is not "Good News" to all people but only to a select few, to the rest it is "Bad News" because they have been predestined not to be saved. Such a notion goes again all sensibilities. The "Good News" is that Christ came to redeem ALL humanity not just a select few.

Look with me for a moment. Look closely. There stands a man or a woman. They are a sinner, guilty before a holy God and have no means or way of paying their sin debt themselves. They are without hope and are to be pitied, for unless they turn to Christ they are eternally lost. They need our prayers and thankfully there is hope in the Christ of the Cross. Christ died on the cross for the atonement of sins...but wait a minute...the death of Christ is not Good News for this person because it is a person for whom Christ DID NOT die. Because before they were born, before they ever came into being, before they ever did a good or bad deed, God intentionally predestined them that they would suffer the agonies of eternal damnation. Their eternal destiny has been predetermined and it cannot be altered and our prayers are in vain because a decree has decided their fate. The person was created by God for the sole purpose of sending them to hell under the pretense it will somehow bring glory to Him. May I say, it is beyond my comprehension how someone can view such a position as anything other than being biblically erroneous regarding the holy-love of God and the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

SUMMARY

While those who believe in divine deterministic election may have their answers to the objections I have raised, after over four decades of studying Calvinism, I do not find any of their arguments convincing. Most of their arguments seem to be forced and, though it is not their intent to be sure, often paint a picture, not of a loving God who has provided salvation for all mankind, but one who is a ruthless Ruler that is playing "eeny-meeny-miny-moe" with the human race. Calvinism does not present an inviting God, but one who keeps us guessing whether or not we are one of the elect.

In embracing or denouncing Calvinism one should consider:

First, is Calvinism consistent with the portrait of God that we find in Jesus Christ who issues a universal invitation to be saved? Is Calvinism consistent with God's revelation of Himself to humanity in which He desires that no one be lost but that all be saved (2 Peter 3:9)? Is Calvinism consistent with the whole of Scripture which is summed up in John 3:16, which states He died for the "world" and that "whosoever believes" shall be saved? If the inquirer is honest, they will have to answer "no" to those questions.

Second, is Calvinism compatible with how the Bible portrays the nature of God? The Bible says the goodness of God endures continually (Ps. 52:1), but is He good if He purposely creates man to commit evil which He says He opposes? The Bible says God is Love (I John 4:8), but is He love if He intentionally creates someone for the purpose of sending them to eternal judgment? The Bible says God is merciful (Ps. 136), but is He merciful if He creates someone who is incapable of making a decision for Christ that will allow them to escape hell? The Bible says God is no respecter of persons (James 2:1), but is He a respecter of persons if He arbitrarily chooses some to salvation while condemning others to judgment irrespective of their foreseen conduct or faith? Calvinism clearly conflicts with the Bible's teaching regarding the nature of God. The God painted in Calvinism defies clear biblical teaching about His nature.

Third, as one studies the early church one discovers the early Church Fathers rejected such divine determinism or unconditional election as heretical (this was rejected as false doctrine by the Particular Synods of Orange A.D. 200 and the Council of Trent A.D. 827). As one reads through the Book of Acts one discovers the early Church held a balance between God's sovereign will and man's responsibility and freedom (Acts 2:22-24). Only after Augustine (354-430) in the fifth century developed the doctrine of predestination and Calvinism in the sixteenth century elaborated upon it, did it become a theological conundrum.

Early church father Irenaeus (died c 202) who was discipled in the Christian faith by Polycarp (69-155), who was discipled by the Apostle John who was a disciple of Christ, considered predestination heresy, writing in *Against Heresies*, "For He who makes the chaff and He who makes the wheat are not different persons, but one and the same, who judges them, that is, separates them. But the wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, serving all lusts; as says the prophet, "Man, being in honor, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them." (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 4, paragraph 3)

Fourth, while the Bible teaches election, which fits better into the whole of biblical teaching and does not conflict with the whole of scripture and the biblical nature of God – that God chose some to salvation and some to judgment before they were created irrespective of their foreseen actions or that His election is based on His foreknowledge and the foreseen acceptance or rejection of the Elect One, Jesus

Christ, by an individual? Each person must answer that for themselves. For me it is the latter.

Fifth, when one studies Calvinism the conclusion is inevitable, that the non-elect are absolutely eternally dammed with no chance of ever being saved and it is no fault of their own whatsoever, for they were created by God with no recourse but to commit the sinful acts they were created to do and with the total inability to receive Christ, and for the sole purpose and reason of being forever lost and suffering the fate of eternal judgment. Foster says it well, "To state this doctrine [Calvinism] in its true character is enough to chill one's blood; and we are drawn, by all that is rational within us, to turn away from such a God with horror, as from the presence of an almighty Tyrant" (R.S. Foster, *Calvinism*, 83).

The more I read in the Bible about the holy-love of God, the life of Christ and His atoning death on the cross and the multitude of invitations issued to All to turn to the God's provision found in Christ, the more I see how egregious Calvinism is and that it is inconsistent biblically and woefully flawed.

Sixth, the teaching of the divine deterministic election of individuals to salvation and others to damnation and the deterministic view of the predestination of all things, good and evil, as taught in Calvinism, is more akin to the extreme deterministic predestination found in Islam than in Christianity. Calvinism finds a more comfortable home in the tent of Islam than in pages of the Bible. For followers of Islam belief in Qadar (predestination) is one of the most basic principles of their faith, without which a person's belief is incomplete. The difference between Calvin's view of predestination and Islam's view is the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Seventh, one must recognize there will always be a mystery and tension between God's sovereignty and man's free will. God is without question sovereign, yet theologian P.T. Forsyth points out that because God is sovereign and omnipotent He is capable of limiting His own sovereignty and omnipotence! One is truly sovereign and omnipotent who can limit their own sovereignty and omnipotence when it comes to dealing with humanity through the Christ of the Cross allowing man the freedom to make a decision for or against Christ. Southern Baptist theologian Dale Moody (1915-1992) writes, "God is sovereign in his rule over the final outcome of history, but that does not deny the freedom of man to make his own decisions even to his own destruction" (Moody, *The Word of Truth*, 338).

Roger E. Olson, professor at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, echoes Moody's thoughts, writing, "Saying we have free will to resist and even [reject Christ] does not diminish the greatness of God's sovereignty and power because

our ability to resist and thwart God's perfect will is given us by God for the sake of having real relationships with us, not artificial ones. Yes, of course, God *could* control us. But he doesn't. Not because we have some power over *him* but because *he* wants us to love him and obey him freely and not by compulsion" (Olson, *What's Wrong with Calvinism?*, www patheos com).

Calvinism restricts the love of God and limits the atoning work of Christ, which is contrary to the biblical message that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). In preaching the Gospel, the Good News of Christ, we must not restrict the scope of the atoning work of Christ. Our message must echo the message the angel proclaimed on that first Christmas night, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to **all people**" (Luke 2:10).

In closing, let me add that each of us deserves eternal judgment as we have sinned against a holy God. Salvation is solely and totally undeserved and totally of grace provided for us by the holy-love of God who not only offered the Sacrifice but in Christ Jesus was the Sacrifice. He lovingly beckons us to come to Him and receive what He has provided for us which we could never provide for ourselves. It is when we respond to Him freely, not by decree, compulsion or coercion, entering into a loving relationship with Him through Christ that we bring *true and genuine* glory to the Father that causes the angels in heaven to rejoice.

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