

Calvinism

Right or Wrong?

An examination of the five points of Calvinism,
including a summary of what Calvinists say
and
a biblical response from a non-Calvinist,
preservationist position.

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What Happened Before The Foundation of the World?

Think back to eternity past before time began, before man existed, and before the creation of the world had taken place. Man was then only an idea in the mind of God. In His omniscience God knew all that would happen after creation. He foreknew what the world would be like and all the events that would occur in the course of time. He foreknew that man would sin and be hopelessly lost. However, before any of these things actually took place, God made some choices and decreed some plans regarding the future work of His Son and the salvation of mankind. God, of course, knows exactly what He did before the foundation of the world. Theologians are still trying to understand what really happened.

Several Scripture passages give us a glimpse of the things which took place back then. God formulated an eternal purpose in Christ Jesus ^(Ephesians 3:11), and foreordained the Son to be a lamb without blemish and without spot ^(I Peter 1:19-20). The effect of this was that the lamb was slain from the foundation of the world ^(Revelation 13:8). In other words, the work of the cross was as good as done from the very moment God planned it in eternity past. God also promised **us** eternal life before the world began ^(Titus 1:2). He also chose **us** in Christ ^(Ephesians 1:4) and gave **us** his own purpose and grace in Christ Jesus ^(II Timothy 1:9).

All of these things are simple statements of the Word of God. Many Calvinists and non-Calvinists agree that these things happened just as they are stated. There are some significant differences, though, in how these things are interpreted. Did God design the plan of redemption first and then choose to include those whom He foreknew would believe in Christ? Or did He elect (chose) some to be saved out of mankind and then design a plan that was intended only for those who were elected or chosen? Who really is the **us** to whom God made these wonderful promises of eternal life?

As we study the subjects of salvation and election, we are given the impression that there are only two choices: Arminianism or Calvinism. Many Christians know they are not Arminian because they understand they are eternally secure in Christ. So they conclude that they must be Calvinist. Then they discover that Calvinists teach some things with which they do not agree. For example, Calvinists teach that Christ died only for the elect, that is, He died only for some men and not for all. Thinking that there are only two choices, non-Arminians pick off of Calvin's tulip the petals with which they think they agree and label themselves as four point, three point, or two point Calvinists.

There are some problems, however, with non-Calvinists (who are also non-Arminian) trying to identify with Calvinists. Non-Calvinists who label themselves four point, three point, etc., generally use the same vocabulary as Calvinists, such as depravity, election and grace, but define the terms differently. By calling themselves Calvinists, non-Calvinists place themselves in "harmony" with those with whom they actually disagree, often without realizing what they are doing. In addition, it is impossible to have a genuine Calvinist tulip with less than five petals. All five petals are inter-related and inseparable. To claim to be less than five point Calvinist is to misunderstand the actual Calvinist teaching on the various points. There is another alternative: just do not call ourselves either Arminian or Calvinist. Why must we have a man's name for a label on our theology? If we believe the Bible, to be a biblicist should be sufficient.

The objective of this paper is to show the connection of all five points of Calvinism, to show the biblical response to these points, and to explain divine election from a non-Calvinist's understanding of Scripture.

The Calvinist's Interpretation Of What Happened Before the World Began

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The Calvinist view of Total Depravity does not focus only on how bad man is, but also and especially on how bad off man is.

Man is bad off because of his total inability to turn to Christ. Whoever will may come to Christ, but man is unable to come to Christ unless the Father draws him as one of the elect. He is totally deprived of all ability to turn to Christ. He is free to turn to Christ, but utterly unable to do so.

Turning to Christ is a spiritual act and the sinner is spiritually dead. He is therefore unable to turn to Christ. Because of sin, man's will is enfeebled. Not only will he not turn to Christ, he cannot. The sinner is disabled. He cannot save himself and will not turn to Christ for salvation until he is born again by the Spirit of God.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

If any man is to be saved, God Himself must do something to bring it about.

God picked out of mankind whom He would save. He chose a number out of the whole human race to be saved. He appointed persons to believe. From eternity, God planned to save one portion of the human race and not another.

On what basis did God choose? God chose some to be saved and did not choose the rest for no other reason than His own wise, just, and gracious purpose. He did not choose on the basis of race, wealth, social position, or any other such thing. He simply picked some and left the rest unpicked.

This does not make God a respecter of persons. You can only be a respecter of persons if you make a difference between equally deserving people. You are not a respecter of persons if you make a difference between equally undeserving people.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Christ could not bear the sins of men without actually saving them, therefore, Christ did not die for all without exception since all are not saved. If Christ had borne the sins of all men without exception then all men would be saved. But this is not the experience of all men, therefore, Christ did not bear the sins of all men, but only the elect. At issue here is not the value but the efficacy of Christ's death. Did He in dying try to save everyone? Did He in dying merely make salvation possible for everyone equally? Was this His intent? If so, then in the end it was not His death that secured our salvation. And if that is so, then His death was not enough. This is why the biblical writers emphasize that in dying, Jesus secured and accomplished the salvation of His people. He did not die in hopes that someone somewhere might somehow make His atonement efficacious. Not at all. He died to save.... In His death, the work that saves was finished.

Everyone for whom Christ died is saved. The view of Christ dying only for the elect in a saving sense is the only sense that gives effectual power to His death. The death of Christ really saves all for whom it was intended. If Christ's death is in reality a substitutionary, vicarious death it saves all for whom it was exercised and no other. That God does not save all proves that Christ did not die for all. It is a contradiction to say that Christ's work has equal reference to both the saved and the unsaved, the elect and the non-elect. There are none for whom Christ died who do not receive salvation in its fullness. Every last person for whom Christ died will enjoy its benefits. From the stand point of justice, none for whom Jesus died can ever be condemned. Because Christ died in their place, justice demands their acquittal.

Since the Father predetermined who would be saved, and the Son foreknew who the elect were, it is illogical to think that Christ would have died for those whom he knew would not be saved. He therefore limited the purpose of His death, restricting its efficacy only for the elect, the sheep, us, the many as opposed to the few.

To say that the Son redeemed all, and the Father elected but a few, is to give greater honor to the One than to the other, and to make an inequality in their operations.

God is the Savior or Preserver of all men in that Christ's work secured a delay for unbelievers in the execution of the sentence against sin. If strict justice had been executed, the race would have been cut off at the first sin. That man lives at all after sinning is due wholly to the Cross. In that judgment is delayed, Christ has preserved the lives of the non-elect for a short time and is therefore the Preserver of the non-elect as well as the Savior of the elect.

When the Bible says that Christ died for the world, it means the world of the elect. Christ taketh away the sin of this world (John 1:29). The sin of the rest of the outer world "remaineth" (John 9:41). God loves this world (John 3:16). His wrath is upon the rest of the world (John 3:17).

When the Bible says that Christ died for all men, it means that He died for all kinds of men, i.e. all races, rich and poor, all classes of men without distinction.

"If God has caused an unsaved person to read this article, how sad and tragic that you have no Savior who died on the cross for your many sins. It is the same as if Christ never came and never hung on the cross for sinners." (Beck)

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

God would not set out to do something which He was unable to finish. If efficacious grace is the exercise of almighty power, it is irresistible. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation! Nothing can stop it. When God calls a man into fellowship of His Son, the call is not refused.

God's saving grace and effectual calling are irresistible, not in the sense that they are never resisted, but in the sense that they are never successfully resisted.

In electing the saved, God encounters them and regenerates them according to His own sovereign will apart from their will. A Divine interference. A man is appointed to believe. He has no choice in the matter because he is unable to choose. He cannot disbelieve if he is appointed to believe. Neither can he believe if he has not been appointed to believe. God decides who will believe and who will not believe.

Since man is unable to believe, God causes the elect to believe. Saving faith rises not from something from within us but from the work of God. We believe, yes, but only as a direct result of God's mighty power at work within us and regenerating grace.

PERSEVERANCE

Moreover, God has justified them, and if He has justified them, who can say otherwise (Romans 8:33)? Is there anyone who can overrule Him? Still more, there is precisely no other which could ever remove God's elect from the saving love of Christ. Nothing. No one. Not now, not ever (Romans 8:35-39).

The question, then, is not whether we might sin. The question is whether God's grace is sufficient to keep us even though we sin (Romans 5:20).

It is further a question of God's power. Can He keep us in faith? Indeed He can (I Peter 1:3-5).

Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion. (Louis Berkhof)

Such only are real believers who endure to the end.... Their persevering attachment to Jesus Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors.

We can have an assurance of our salvation not only for today but for all time. But the assurance that we have, or confidence in our future estate in salvation, must be based upon the right foundations. In other words, if my confidence that I will persevere is based on my confidence that I will not sin, it's on very shaky ground. One thing the Bible makes clear to me is that even though I am a redeemed person, I will in all likelihood, and inevitably, continue to sin to some degree. If it were up to my strength to persevere to guarantee my future salvation, then I would have very little hope of persevering.... My confidence rests in the intercession of Christ and God's ability and promise to hold on to me. In and of myself I am capable of sinning even unto the loss of my salvation, but I'm persuaded that God in His grace will keep me from that. (R.C. Sproul)

Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence He still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality.... This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with Him, the oath of God, the abiding of His Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.... And though they may... fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit... yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end. (The Baptist Confession of Faith - London, 1689)

Summary

Charles R. Smith, a professor of theology, outlines the Calvinists' viewpoint concerning the order of events before the world began:

1. The decision to create
2. The decision to allow the fall
3. The election of certain individuals
4. The decision to provide Jesus as Savior
5. The decision to send the Holy Spirit to accomplish salvation in regeneration.

In the Calvinists' point of view, man's fall into sin resulted not only in the acquisition of the sin nature, but in the loss of all ability to respond to God. Man, they say, is totally deprived of all ability to turn to Christ. He is free to do so, but utterly unable to do so. Turning to Christ is a

spiritual act and the sinner is spiritually dead. Because of sin, man's will is enfeebled. The sinner is disabled. He cannot save himself and will not turn to Christ for salvation **until** he is born again by the Spirit of God.

Knowing this in eternity past, say the Calvinists, God decided to do for **some** men what they would never be able to do for themselves. In the process, He decided not to do this for everyone. God chose a certain number out of the human race to be saved and He did so without regard to any human qualifications. He picked out of mankind whom he would save regardless of their race, financial status, social position, or any other such matter. He made His choice based on no other reason than His own wise, just, and gracious purpose. On this basis alone He picked some and left the rest unpicked. The Calvinists contend that God was in no way a respecter of persons by doing this because one can only be a respecter of persons by making a difference between equally deserving people. There is no respect of persons, they say, in making a difference between equally undeserving people. So when God determined in eternity past that He would allow man to sin and knew that sin would result in man's total inability to respond to Him, God made a difference among equally undeserving men, randomly selecting some human beings to be saved, leaving the rest to be unsaved.

Then, say the Calvinists, God ordained the Son to be the Lamb that would die for the sins of the elect only. Since the Father had predetermined who would be saved and the Son knew in eternity past who the elect were, He logically purposed to die only for those who were picked for salvation. In the Calvinistic mind, the view of Christ dying only for the elect in a saving sense is the only sense that gives effectual power to His death. They say that Christ's death really saves all for whom it was intended. If Christ's death is in reality a substitutionary, vicarious death, it saves all for whom it was exercised. That God does not save all proves that Christ did not die for all. Calvinists cringe at the suggestion that Christ died for some who are never saved. To them, this would mean that Christ was a failure. How could Christ die for a man without His death resulting in the salvation of that man? In eternity past, say the Calvinists, when God elected some men to be saved, He prepared a means of salvation that was intended only for them and no one else, and everyone for whom it was prepared He successfully saved by the cross.

According to the Calvinists, man has no part to play whatsoever in salvation, not even believing. God determined to save the elect completely apart from their own will. This, of course was necessary because of man's total inability to respond to God. Since turning to Christ and believing the Gospel are spiritual acts and unsaved man is totally unable to do either, man has to be regenerated and faith implanted in his heart entirely by an act of God apart from the will of man. This is an irresistible act of grace. Nothing can stop it from happening. If a particular person is appointed to believe, God will divinely interfere in his life and cause him to repent. He will regenerate that man and give him the gift of faith entirely apart from the man's own will. The man has no choice in the matter because he is unable to choose. Saving faith does not rise from something within man, but occurs only as a direct result of God's mighty power at work within man and as a result of God's irresistible regenerating grace as applied by the Holy Spirit.

Of course, if a man has not been appointed to believe, the Calvinists say he has no Savior who died on the cross for his sins. For the non-elect, it is as if Christ never came and never hung on the cross for sinners. In eternity past, they say, God prepared the plan of redemption exclusively for the limited number of human beings He picked out of all mankind to be saved. Neither the elect nor the non-elect would have any choice about the matter. God's predetermination sealed the destiny of every individual human being before the foundation of the world. Once faith is implanted in the heart of a man, that man will persevere in the faith to the end no matter what. But if a man has not been appointed to believe, he has no hope.

The Non-Calvinist's Interpretation Of What Happened Before the World Began

Charles R. Smith also outlined the non-Calvinist's viewpoint concerning the order of events before the world began:

1. The decision to create
2. The decision to allow the fall
3. The decision to provide Jesus as Savior
4. The election of certain individuals
5. The decision to send the Holy Spirit to accomplish salvation in regeneration.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Some of us who are non-Calvinists agree with the Calvinists that man's fall resulted in the acquisition of the sin nature and that this fallen nature effects every part of man's person. The Scripture is very clear that man does not have a spark of good which he can draw upon for noble acts. *There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one* ^(Romans 3:10-12). It couldn't be much clearer.

But we do not agree that total depravity means total inability. Along with the idea of creating man, God decided to design man as a whole person with the ability to think, the ability to feel, and the ability to choose ^(Genesis 2:16-17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Romans 6:16). He understood that man would use his will to choose to sin. He then designed a plan before creation by which all fallen men could also choose to be saved ^(John 1:12). This in no way suggests that man could save himself, but only that he could freely receive the salvation that God would offer to whosoever would believe ^(John 3:16). [Note that according to Scripture, man's ability to choose is in no way restricted only to those who are already born again ^(Proverbs 1:20-33). Unbelievers are frequently depicted as making choices through Scripture ^(II Kings 5:1-15; Jonah 3:4-10; Acts 26:28).

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Divine election, we believe then, was based upon God's foreknowledge of who would choose to believe and who would choose not to believe, not upon a random selection of some. After God ordained the Son to be a sacrifice for the sin of all mankind, He foreknew that only some men would choose to believe in Christ and that others would choose not to believe even though they would be given the opportunity to do so. Knowing this, God was left with a choice. Would He save every one regardless of how they responded to the Gospel message, or would He save only those who believed? In His infinite wisdom, justice, and grace, God the Father decided to include only those who believed the Gospel and received Christ as their Savior. Acting on this principle before the foundation of the world, He elected, or selected, for salvation only those individuals whom He foreknew would believe and receive Christ. The Bible is very clear about this order of events. Peter was led to write *to the strangers...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...* ^(I Peter 1:1-2). The preposition "according to" as it is used here shows how one thing proceeds from another. In the same passage, verse 3 says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope....* This tells us that God's begetting us again unto a lively hope proceeded from, or out of, His abundant mercy. In the same way, verse two tells us that His electing us proceeded out of His foreknowledge. Romans 8:29-30 agrees with this order. It lists several things that God did including foreknowing, predestinating, calling, justifying, and glorifying. It is very clear from these verses that God's foreknowledge came first: *For whom he did foreknow, (first), he also (afterwards) did predestinate.*

We also believe that man's salvation is conditional: not on any condition of work or merit, but on the condition of his belief in the Gospel and his receiving Christ. But if man is depraved, how could he choose to believe? God's plan for all mankind was to draw men to himself through His Word. It is true (because the Bible says so) that if God does not draw a man to Himself, that man will never choose to seek God on his own^(John 6:44). But consider the broader context of this verse. Verse 45 goes on to say, *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.* **All** are taught, exposed to faith through the truth and given the opportunity to respond. Only those who hear and learn (or receive) the truth are saved. The Bible says that God's plan from the beginning was to draw **all** men to himself through Christ, giving everyone the opportunity to believe^(John 12:32). While a man cannot come except the Father draw him, not all who are drawn come.^(Matthew 20:16). The opportunity to believe comes specifically through a person's exposure to the Word of God^(Romans 10:17). Having been exposed to faith by the Word of God, man then has a viable choice -- believe or refuse to believe, hear and learn (receive) the truth or reject it. There are many passages of Scripture which teach this truth, that salvation is conditional upon the belief of the individual.

John 3:16 - 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.

John 3:18 - He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 7:37-38 - ...If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

John 10:9 - I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved....

Acts 2:21 - And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Acts 10:43 - To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Romans 10:13 - For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

I John 4:15 - Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

I John 5:1 - Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God....

It is a totally arbitrary definition of respecter of persons to say that one is a respecter of persons when making a difference in one instance but not in another. Noah Webster defined respecter of persons in this way: "RESPECTER, *n.* One that respects; chiefly used in the phrase, *respecter of persons*, which signifies a person who regards the external circumstances of others in his judgment, and suffers his opinion to be biased by them, to the prejudice of candor, justice and equity." As an illustration, Mr. Webster sites Acts 10:34b, "*I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.*" All men have equity in the state of depravity. Choosing between **equally** deserving or **equally** undeserving people would make God a respecter of persons either way. Since God is not a respecter of persons, He would not have made such a discriminating choice.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Neither do we agree that God ordained His Son to die only for some men and not for all men. Scripture says that Christ *gave himself a ransom for all* ^(I Timothy 2:6). The Calvinists explain this away by saying that Christ died for all classes of men without distinction, not for all persons without exception. We non-Calvinists choose not to read into Scripture things it does not say. When it says that Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all, we believe all means all. When it says that Jesus tasted death *for every man* ^(Hebrews 2:9) we believe it means every man and not just every one who would have faith irresistibly implanted in his heart. When it says *He is the propitiation for...the sins of the whole world* ^(I John 2:2), we believe it means the whole world and not just for the world of the elect. When it says He gave His life *a ransom for many* ^(Matthew 20:28) we believe it means the many as opposed to a few.

On this point it is important to note that when Scripture compares many and all it generally uses these terms to refer to the same quantity ^(Proverbs 31:29; Acts 2:39; I Corinthians 10:17). Scripture typically uses the word *few* when referring to a different quantity than *many* ^(Jeremiah 42:2; Matthew 20:16). The word *chosen* in Matthew 20:16 is the word *eklektos*. It is used 23 times in the New Testament and is translated *elect* 16 times in such passages as Romans 8:33, Colossians 3:12, II Timothy 2:10 and I Peter 1:2 where it is used in obvious reference to the elect in Christ. When Matthew 20:16 says, *for many be called, but few chosen*, it is saying that God calls the many, the large group, the whole human race, but few, a small group out of the whole, are elect. Calvinists say that God only calls those whom He elects. This Scriptural statement contradicts the Calvinists.

We believe that Christ's death sufficiently satisfied God the Father for the sins of the whole human race without exception. I John 1:2 says, *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*. If the whole world in this verse is restricted only to the elect, what is the sense of the contrast made in the verse between *ours* and *the whole world*? This verse obviously draws a contrast between those who are saved and those who are not, saying that Jesus Christ satisfied God for the sins of all who are saved and also for the sins of the entire world, including all the non-saved.

The purpose of the cross was to satisfy God concerning sin and not to actuate the rebirth of the elect. Propitiation and reconciliation are brought about by the cross ^(Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20). Justification and regeneration are brought about when a man responds to the preaching of the cross ^(I Corinthians 1:18; Romans 5:1; I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5,7). God has been satisfied concerning the sin of all men, but only those who come to Christ in repentance and faith actually have their sins forgiven.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

It is not true that grace is by definition irresistible. It is man's rejection of God that causes God's rejection of man

^(I Samuel 15:23; Jeremiah 6:19; Hosea 4:6). God gives His grace only to those who willingly receive it ^(Romans 5:17).

In giving man a choice, God takes nothing away from His own sovereignty. Allowing man to sin had no adverse effect on God's sovereignty. Allowing man to choose on his own to believe or not to believe the Gospel has no different ramifications on the nature of God than allowing man to fall into sin in the first place. God's sovereignty gives Him the prerogative of either determining that something **must** happen, or that something **may** happen. To say that man **may** be saved **if** he believes the Gospel is totally within the scope of the sovereign will of God ^(Genesis 3:3; Proverbs 20:13; Romans 11:21).

None of this diminishes God's sovereignty. All of it takes place within the scope of His sovereign rule. He sovereignly prescribes what will take place if man responds one way and He sovereignly prescribes what will take place if man responds differently. Consider the events in

Nineveh as recorded in the book of Jonah. God clearly decreed that Ninevah was doomed, yet when Ninevah repented, God was already prepared to extend mercy.

In receiving salvation by faith, man in no way is actually bringing about his own salvation. Faith is not a work. Faith is merely the act of receiving the salvation that is completely and entirely accomplished by God Himself as an act of grace ^(John 1:13; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:2; Romans 4:5).

Neither is the force of Christ's sacrifice diminished by saying that He died for all men without exception, including those who will never believe and be saved. In fact, the potential of the shed blood being applied to all men makes the cross much more powerful than if its efficacy was only intended for a few. How powerful is it for an evangelist to say, "I'm not sure whether Christ died for you or not. If you are one of the elect, He died for you. If you are not one of the elect, He did not die for you." This is a weak message. The real power of the cross is in preaching "whosoever will may come."

The fact that not everyone accepts this sacrifice made on their behalf does not make Christ a failure. Christ accomplished on the cross exactly what He intended to accomplish. He satisfied God concerning the sins of the whole world ^(I John 1:2). The fact that some refuse God's offer of salvation is a testimony to the failure of man, not of God. God is not willing that any man should perish ^(II Peter 3:9). He wants all men to be saved ^(I Timothy 2:4). What would be the purpose of Scripture telling us that God wants all elect men to be saved because He does not want any elect man to perish? Would this mean that God actually wants all non-elect men to perish and not be saved? Somehow, this does not fit the nature of God who loves the world and whose heart is full of mercy and compassion ^(Psalm 86:15; Psalm 145:8). God is not a failure in providing salvation for many who will never be saved. He is a great success in providing salvation that is sufficient for every human being that will ever live. The righteousness of God *is by faith of Jesus Christ **unto** all and **upon** all them that believe* ^(Romans 3:22). It is genuinely offered **unto** all. It is placed **upon** only those who believe. The work of Christ is **sufficient for** everyone, but it is **efficient only for** those who receive the Savior.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

This is the one point of connection that non-Calvinist preservationists have with Calvin's tulip. We say amen to the truth that those who truly are saved will never be lost. Of course, the idea of the perseverance of the saints involves a little more than the simple truth of the eternal security of the believer. Eternal security is the belief that a true believer will never lose his salvation. Perseverance of the saints is the belief that a true believer will keep on believing throughout his earthly life. A believer is eternally secure because he is kept by the power of God alone, and not by the believer's own merits or efforts ^(I Peter 1:5). But how does a saint persevere? The Calvinist says that it is by the immutability of the decree of God. If God has chosen a man to believe, that man will believe to the very end. He may fall into great depths of sin and degradation, deny faith and actually stop believing the gospel for a time, but he will ultimately repent and be preserved to faith because God has decreed it to be so.

Non-Calvinists who believe in eternal security also believe in the perseverance of the saints. If a person's faith is genuine and he is truly born again, then he will continue to have genuine faith in his heart throughout his life on earth and that faith will be nurtured by the Holy Spirit who dwells within him. He may sin, live carnally, or remain a spiritual infant for a long time. But throughout his life while God is chastening him for his sin, he never stops believing.

When a person who professes to be saved falls off into persistent sinfulness, we rightfully question whether they were ever really saved. Those who are not truly saved but have only an empty profession, will ultimately be drawn back into the world by all of its enticements. As I John

2:19 says, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* Someone who forsakes altogether the faith he once professed is like the stony soil in Christ's parable. There was the appearance of faith because the plant sprung up. But there was no root, no genuineness to the faith, and it could not endure because it was not real.

Real Christians persevere in their faith. This is the truth taught by such verses as follows. They are often used to suggest that a believer might lose his salvation, but they actually explain that one of the characteristics of true believers is that they persevere in their faith.

Colossians 1:22-23 *...to present you holy and unblameable, and unproveable in his sight: **if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.***

Hebrews 3:6 *But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, **if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.***

Hebrews 3:14 *For we are made partakers of Christ, **if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;***

The Harmony of the Sovereignty of God And the Free Will of Man

There are many who struggle in an attempt to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Some in frustration throw up their hands and say that somehow they are both true, but that it is impossible for man to understand how they fit together. They read the passages of Scripture on election and believe that God has after all chosen us and we have no choice of our own. Then they read the whosoever passages and believe we must act on faith ourselves. Flustered by such contradictions, yet determined to believe all the Word of God, many simply avoid talking about these biblical subjects.

The subject of divine election is not that difficult. The sovereignty of God and the free will of man function in perfect harmony because God ordained that they should do so. God never selected some men for salvation against their will and left the rest to wander hopelessly without an opportunity to believe. Before the world began, God the Father ordained the Son to be a lamb without blemish and without spot who would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world and satisfy the righteous demands of the Godhead. He foreknew which human beings would accept this plan and which ones would reject it. He decided to include only those who believed and on the basis of His foreknowledge chose only believers to be in Christ. He prepared many wonderful things for those who would choose to love Him ^(1 Corinthians 2:9) including the guarantee that they would never die again ^(John 11:26). He predestined all those who would believe to be saved physically as well as spiritually and to receive a glorified body just like that of His Son's ^(Romans 8:23,29; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:). In the process, His foreknowledge took nothing away from man's future opportunity to choose and man's future freedom to choose took nothing away from God's sovereignty.

If God has caused an unsaved person to read this article, how happy and fortunate that you have a Savior who died on the cross for your many sins. Christ came and hung on the cross for you just as much as anyone else. God's invitation is open. If you will confess and repent of your sins and believe the Gospel of Christ, He will save you from your sins and give you eternal life.

Will you? The Bible says whosoever will, may. 📖

Sources:

Some of the statements attributed to Calvinists are direct quotes and are so indicated in parenthesis following the quotations. Other statements are paraphrases, summaries, or include partial quotes of two primary sources used as representative of Calvinist statements. These sources are as follows:

1. The Five Points of Calvinism, by Frank B. Beck, formerly Pastor of North East Baptist Church, Millerton, New York, now with the Lord. Published by Calvary Baptist church in Ashland, Kentucky.
2. The Five Points of Calvinism, by Fred G. Zaspel, Pastor of Word of Life Baptist Church in Pottsville, PA.

Many other sources were used as well in coming to an understanding of the problems with Tulip theology.