

Why I Am a Calvinist, Part 8

Scripture: 1 John 4:19

Code: A348

by Phil Johnson

. . . and why every Christian is a Calvinist of sorts.

Part VIII: To sum up. . .

We've been taking note of five important truths implied in the eight words of 1 John 4:19 ("We love Him because He first loved us"). I alliterated the five implications of that text I highlighted for you, but if you simply give them slightly different names, they spell TULIP:

- * The perverseness of our fallen state—that's the doctrine of **Total Depravity**.
- * The priority of God's electing choice—that is the doctrine of **Unconditional Election**
- * The particularity of His saving work—that, as we saw, entails the doctrine that is often called **Limited Atonement**.
- * The power of His loving deliverance—that, once more, is the doctrine of **Irresistible Grace**.
- * The perfection of His redemptive plan—that is nothing other than the doctrine of **Perseverance**.

You might be one of those people who doesn't want to be referred to as a Calvinist or an Arminian. But the fact is, if you are a Christian at all, you do already affirm the fundamental principle in every one of those truths. You already know in your heart of hearts that you weren't born again because you were morally superior to your unbelieving neighbors. You were worthy of God's wrath just like them (Ephesians 2:1-3). According to Ephesians 2:4-6, it was God who quickened you and showed you a special mercy—and that is why you are a believer. You already know that in your heart. You don't really believe you summoned faith and came to Christ in your own power and by your own unaided free will. You don't actually believe you are morally superior to people who don't believe. You therefore must see, somewhere in your soul, that God has given you special grace that He has not necessarily shown everyone.

You also believe God is absolutely sovereign over all things. I know you do, because you lean on the promise of Romans 8:28. And that promise would mean nothing if God were not in control of every detail of everything that happens. If He is not in control of all things, how could He work all things together for good?

Furthermore, you pray for the lost, which means in your heart, you believe God is sovereign over their salvation. If you didn't really believe He was sovereign in saving sinners, you'd quit praying for the lost and start doing everything you could to buttonhole people into the kingdom by hook or by

crook, instead. But you know that would be folly. And you pray about other things, too, don't you? You pray that God will change this person's heart, or alter the circumstances of that problem. That's pure Calvinism. When we go to God in prayer, we're expressing faith in His sovereignty over the circumstances of our lives.

You even believe God operates sovereignly in the administration of all His providence. You say things like, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15)—because in your heart you believe that God works all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11), and nothing happens apart from His will.

Nothing is more biblical than these doctrines that are commonly labeled Calvinism. In a way, it is a shame they have been given an extrabiblical name, because these truths are the very essence of what Scripture teaches. The very gist of Calvinism is nowhere more clearly stated than in the simple words of our verse: "We love Him, because He first loved us."

This post is adapted from a transcript of a seminar from the 2007 Shepherds' Conference, titled "Closet Calvinists."

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