

The Bible and Calvinism

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

11-14-14

INTRODUCTION

The heresy of Calvinism has been a perennial problem for Christians because of its subtle aberrations from truth and its heady nature. Recently Traditional Calvinism has been downgraded by the merging of it with worldliness to produce New Calvinism. The Bible repudiates these recent heresies, especially as one considers the biblical working of the Holy Spirit in redemption.

I. Traditional Calvinism

A. John Calvin (1509-1564):

1. He held to reprobation of the non-elect.
2. He held to limited atonement, teaching that the words “all” or “world” refer to the elect.
3. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he entitled a chapter, “Of the Eternal Election by Which God has Predestinated Some to Salvation, and Others to Destruction” (Volume Three, Chapter 21).

B. John Cocceius (1603-1669): One of the early originators of Covenant (also known as Reformed or Federal) Theology, framing salvation around the three following covenants:

1. Covenant of Redemption (in eternity the Father covenanted with the Son to provide redemption for man).
2. Covenant of Works (God covenanted with Adam that as long as he obeyed in the Garden he had life).
3. Covenant of Grace (God covenanted with sinful man [regenerated elect] to give redemption for those who trust Christ; it fosters the closed system of Calvinistic determinism which emphasizes ‘sovereignty’). The following are some heresies of Covenant Theology:
 - a. Regeneration precedes faith/repentance/conversion.
 - b. Elect = Church.
 - c. The Church (i.e., the elect) will go through Tribulation.
 - d. Infant Baptism.

C. Louis Berkhof (1873-1957): He summarized the Reformed position on regeneration as preceding and pre-requisite for salvation/conversion:

1. “Now we should not make the mistake of regarding this logical order as a temporal order that will apply in all cases. The new life is often implanted in the hearts of children long before they

are able to hear the call of the gospel; yet they are endowed with this life only where the gospel is preached.”¹

2. “Consequently, a twofold definition must be given of conversion: (a) Active conversion is that act of God whereby He causes **the regenerated sinner**, in his conscious life, to turn to Him in repentance and faith. (b) Passive conversion is the resulting conscious act of **the regenerated sinner** whereby he, through the grace of God, turns to God in repentance and faith.”²

3. “Those who die **in infancy must be regenerated**, in order to be saved, but cannot very well experience conversion, a conscious turning from sin unto God. In the case of adults, however, conversion is absolutely essential, but it need not appear in each one’s life as a strongly marked crisis.”³

D. TULIP: The five points (remembered by the mnemonic T. U. L. I. P.) are popularly said to summarize the Canons of Dort. The five points were popularized in the 1963 booklet *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, Documented* by David Steele and Curtis Thomas. The origins of the five points and the acronym are uncertain, but the acronym was used by Cleland McAfee as early as c. 1905. An early printed appearance of the T-U-L-I-P acronym is in Loraine Boettner's 1932 book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*.⁴

1. TOTAL DEPRAVITY: Man has total inability (since he is spiritually dead) to save himself and to turn to God. This view is based on Augustine’s explanation of original sin.

2. UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION: God has chosen from eternity those whom he will save not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, his choice is unconditionally grounded in his mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those he has chosen (the elect) and to withhold mercy from those not chosen (non-elect). Those chosen elect receive salvation through Christ alone. Those non elect receive the just wrath that is warranted for their sins against God.

3. LIMITED ATONEMENT: based on God’s election, Christ’s atonement was for the elect only, and therefore, particular atonement.

4. IRRESISTIBLE GRACE: God’s saving grace is effectually applied to the elect and sovereignly overcomes all resistance to the inward call.

5. PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS: God is sovereign and His will to accomplish salvation for the elect saints will not be frustrated.

E. Modern Advocates of the TULIP

1. Total Depravity (= Total Inability)

¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1941), pp. 471-472.

²P. 483.

³P. 491.

⁴Loraine Boettner. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 42.

- a. K. Talbot and W. Crampton state: “The Bible stresses the total inability of fallen man to respond to the things of God...this is what the Calvinist refers to as ‘total depravity.’”⁵
- b. Therefore, R. C. Sproul states: “A cardinal point of reformed theology is the maxim, ‘Regeneration precedes faith.’”⁶
- c. It follows then, as H. Hoeksema states: “regeneration can take place in the smallest of infants...in the sphere of the covenant of God, He usually regenerates His elect children from infancy.”⁷
- d. James White affirms: “The Reformed assertion is that man cannot understand and embrace the gospel nor respond in faith and repentance toward Christ without God first freeing him from sin and giving him spiritual life (regeneration).”⁸
- e. Scriptures refuting regeneration before faith: Mk. 16:16; Lk. 8:12; Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 2:8.

2. Unconditional Election

- a. Edwin Palmer states: “He who accepts one of the points (of TULIP) will accept the other points. Unconditional election necessarily follows from total depravity.”⁹
- b. Sproul declares: “By making election conditional upon something that man does, even if what he does is simply to repent and believe the gospel, God’s grace is seriously compromised.”¹⁰
- c. Scriptures refuting unconditional election: I Thes. 1:4; II Tim. 2:10; II Pet. 1:10.

3. Limited Atonement

- a. Palmer insists: “The Bible teaches again and again that God does not love all people with the same love... ‘loved by God’ is not applied to the world but only to the saints.”¹¹
- b. G. Gunn affirms: “The doctrine of limited atonement is simply that at the cross of Christ provides a sure, secure and real salvation for everyone God intended it to save and for them alone.”¹²
- c. Scriptures refuting limited atonement: Jn. 1:29; 3:14-16; 7:37; Rom. 5:6; Gal. 3:22; I Tim. 2:4; I Tim. 4:10; II Pet. 2:1; I Jn. 2:1-2, Rev. 22:17.

4. Irresistible Grace

- a. Piper explains: “There can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace. If we are dead in ours, totally unable to submit to God, then we will never believe in Christ unless God overcomes our rebellion.”¹³

⁵All references under TULIP come from the excellent polemic by Dave Hunt, *What Love is This? Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God* (Sisters, Oregon: Loyal Publishing, Inc. 2002), p. 94.

⁶Hunt, p. 95.

⁷Hunt, p. 95.

⁸Hunt, p. 98.

⁹Hunt, p. 190.

¹⁰Hunt, p. 191.

¹¹Hunt, p. 237.

¹²Hunt, p. 239.

b. C. Cole observes: “The power of grace is the power of God. This makes it fitting to speak of irresistible grace. Surely we can speak of an irresistible God.”¹⁴

c. Scriptures refuting irresistible grace: Ps. 111:4; Jon. 4:2; Mt. 11:28; Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 1:4; Eph. 2:5, 7-8.

5. Perseverance of the Saints

1. Piper recognizes: “We must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith.”¹⁵

2. R. Kendall records: “Nearly all of the Puritan ‘divines’ went through great doubt and despair on their deathbeds as they realized their lives did not give perfect evidence that they were elect.”¹⁶

3. Congdon bemoans: “Absolute assurance of salvation is impossible in Classical Calvinism...”¹⁷

4. C. Hodge teaches: “The only evidence of our election...[and] perseverance, is a patient continuance in well-doing.”¹⁸

5. Scriptures refuting perseverance of the saints doctrine: Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; Gal. 2:20; 5:5; Heb. 10:38; 11:3, 39.

F. Summation: The Elect (the Church) have been predetermined before creation to soteriological election because they otherwise would be unable to repent and believe, and therefore being regenerated in infancy, they cannot resist saving grace, and will continue on in their good works, since they are the exclusive recipients of the benefit of Christ’s particular atonement.

II. The New Calvinism

A. Definition: it is rooted in the traditional/historical position of Reformed Theology, including TULIP, and Puritan sanctification, while embracing the continuationist position concerning tongues and prophecy. According to Mark Driscoll, New Calvinism is defined as 1) missional with regard to culture, 2) anti-cessationist with regard to tongues, and 3) is open to dialogue with other Christian beliefs.

B. Current Leaders

1. John Piper (b. 1946) served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN for 33 years until recently retiring. He has written *Don’t Waste Your Life* and *Desiring God*:

¹³Hunt, p. 286.

¹⁴Hunt, p. 291.

¹⁵Hunt, p. 378.

¹⁶Hunt, p. 378.

¹⁷Hunt, p. 378.

¹⁸Hunt, p. 381

Meditations of a Christian Hedonist.¹⁹ He is Calvinistic in soteriology (unconditional reprobation for the non-elect),²⁰ Post-Trib in eschatology, a continuationist with regard to tongues, and promotes Christian hip-hop artists in contemporary worship.

2. Mark Driscoll (b. 1970) is the pastor of the mega-church Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA (14,000 members in 5 states [?]). He is an active supporter of the “emergent church movement” (its nature is trans-denominational in constituency, and its motivation is new practical ecclesiology because of disillusionment with the “organized and institutional church”). He started the Acts 29 Network for church planting. He preaches his Calvinism in blue jeans accompanied with foul language and risqué references. He is currently being investigated for the allegations of 21 former church elders concerning his integrity and leadership.

a. Driscoll is highly promoted by theologian D. A. Carson and pastor John Piper.

b. E. S. Williams asks whether Mark Driscoll is a false teacher, since the following is a summary of the fruits by which he is known:

- 1) “Bringing licentiousness into the church.
- 2) Dishonoring marriage.
- 3) Treading a dangerous path on pornography.
- 4) Using coarse language and worldly presentation.
- 5) Mocking and making light of Scripture.
- 6) Reveling in and exploiting extremely worldly rock music.
- 7) Endorsing supernatural visions and gifts.
- 8) Promoting tattoos.”²¹

3. Matt Chandler (b. 1974) is lead pastor of The Village Church (SBC) in Dallas, TX, and president of Acts 29 Network. He described himself as a Calvinistic Baptist, dispensational, and charismatic.

4. Albert Mohler (b. 1959) is the ninth president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBC) in Louisville, Kentucky. He is on the board of Focus on the Family, and has spoken at Brigham Young University. He is a proponent for the Calvinist resurgence in the SBC.

¹⁹Piper’s philosophy of hedonism arose out of one of C. S. Lewis’ sermons, “The Weight of Glory.” Lewis “converted to Christianity” out of occultic atheism, and became a pro-Catholic Anglican holding to theologically liberal views such as errancy of Scripture, purgatory, prayers for the dead, transubstantiation, and baptismal regeneration. See ‘Did C. S. Lewis Go to Heaven?’ John W. Robbins, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal>.

²⁰Hunt cites Bob Wilkin who stated, “John Piper...described himself as ‘a seven point Calvinist’...[and said] that no Christian can be sure he is a true believer; hence there is an ongoing need to be dedicated to the Lord and deny ourselves so that we might make it. [We must endure to the end in faith if we are to be saved.]” He added “[the Reformed theology] makes assurance impossible.” Hunt, p. 379.

²¹E. S. Williams, *The New Calvinists: Changing the Gospel* (London: The Wakeman Trust and Belmont House Publ., 2014), pp. 48-50.

III. The Holy Spirit in Salvation

A. Relative to the Unbeliever

1. The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner.

a. *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ Of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰ Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; ¹¹ Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged”* (Jn. 16:8-11).

b. *“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth”* (Acts 7:54).

2. The Holy Spirit may be resisted.

a. *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye”* (Acts 7:51).

b. *“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, ⁸ Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: ⁹ When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years”* (Heb. 3:7-9).

c. *“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”* (Heb. 10:29).

d. *“Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel”* (Ps. 78:41).

3. The Holy Spirit may be blasphemed. *“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. ³² And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come”* (Mt. 12:31-32).

4. The Holy Spirit calls sinners to salvation. *“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Rev. 22:17).

5. The Holy Spirit regenerates the repentant sinner.

a. *“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. ⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”* (Jn. 3:5-8).

b. *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: ²³ Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. ²⁴ For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: ²⁵ But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”* (I Pet. 1:22-25).

c. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Tit. 3:5).

B. Relative to a Believer

1. The Holy Spirit Indwells the Believer.

a. *“And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them”* (Ezk. 36:27).

b. *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's”* (I Cor. 6:19-20).

2. The Holy Spirit Seals the Believer. *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise”* (Eph. 1:13; see 4:30).

3. The Holy Spirit Sanctifies the Believer. *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied”* (I Pet. 1:2).

4. The Holy Spirit Fills the Believer.

a. *“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4).

b. *“And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him”* (Acts 3:10).

5. The Holy Spirit Gifts the Believer. *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit”* (I Cor. 12:4).

6. The Holy Spirit Teaches the Believer. *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come”* (Jn. 16:13).

7. The Holy Spirit Assures the Believer. *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Rom 8:16).

CONCLUSION

Traditional Calvinism is flawed biblically and New Calvinism is repugnant practically, as Bible believers expose both heresies with the light of Scripture. The Lord's assemblies need to recognize the false Gospel of Traditional Calvinism and carnal worldliness of New Calvinism, and reject both. Paul admonished, saying, "*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; ⁴ He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, ⁵ Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself***"²² (I Tim. 6:3-5).

²²This prepositional phrase is omitted in the CT!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1941.
- Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1932.
- Carson, D. A. *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, Publ., 2002.
- Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998 reprint.
- Driscoll, Mark. *The Radical Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. House, 2004.
- Hunt, David. *What Love is This? Calvinism Misrepresentation of God*. Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishing, Inc., 2002.
- Piper, John. *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther and Calvin*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006.
- Strouse, Thomas M. *To the Seven Churches: A Commentary on the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2013.
- Vance, Laurence. *The Other Side of Calvinism*. Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1999.
- White, James R. *The Potter's Freedom*. Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publ., 2000.
- Williams, E. S. *The New Calvinists: Changing the Gospel*. London: The Wakeman Trust and Belmont House Publ., 2014.