

5 Reasons I'm A Calvinist

Written by Stephen Altrogge | Monday, March 13, 2017

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Calvinist”? A grumpy, cold-hearted person who only wants a select few people to get into heaven? An annoying guy who won't stop rambling on about Romans 9? That awful, sterile, passionless church you used to go to?

I get it.

Calvinism doesn't have a fantastic reputation, at least in some circles. Some people feel like it focuses more on theology than on loving people. Others have had really bad experiences with Calvinists. And some people think it runs counter to the beautiful free offer of grace found in the Bible.

But what if someone who is *not* a jerk (at least most of the time) could talk about Calvinism in a way that *didn't* make you want to smash your computer?

That's what I'm going to try to do in this post. I want to explain why I'm a Calvinist, why it brings me great joy, and why I think it's profoundly biblical. If at the end you disagree with me, that's okay. We can still be BFS (best friends sometimes).

I can't answer all your objections in this post. I'm not intending to turn this into a furious, spittle-flying debate. Think of this as a pleasant conversation over a craft beer (or coffee if you're a Baptist).

WHAT IS A CALVINIST?

Before we dive off the deep end, I should take a minute to define what I mean by Calvinism.

A simple definition is this:

Calvinism is a series of doctrines that describes the state of humanity apart from God, how God saves people, and how God will ultimately bring those people to Glory.

A common acronym used to remember the doctrines of Calvinism is:

- T – Total Depravity

- U – Unconditional Election
- L – Limited Atonement
- I – Irresistible Grace
- P – Perseverance of the Saints

I don't like some of the phrases in the acronym and I think they can be confusing but it's what most people use.

BECAUSE IT'S ALL OVER THE BIBLE

I am not a Calvinist because of John Calvin. In fact, if John Calvin never existed I would still be a Calvinist (except it wouldn't be called "Calvinism"). I don't have man-crush on Calvin, nor do I think he's the greatest person since Jesus. I won't name any of my kids "Calvin".

Calvin simply took some biblical ideas and organized them. Actually, I prefer the term "Doctrines of Grace" rather than Calvinism. It better describes the doctrines. Plus it takes the focus off John Calvin who, just like everyone else, had some great strengths and wicked weaknesses.

I believe in the doctrines of grace because they run throughout the entire Bible, like a golden thread from Genesis to Revelation. In the Old Testament, we see that God unconditionally *chose* Israel to be his people.

Deuteronomy 7:6-7 says:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples...

This theme, of God choosing a people for himself, comes up again and again, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God clearly chose Israel to be his people, and that choice was not based on anything they had done. It was an unconditional choice.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter uses this same language to reflect the way God continues to choose those who will be his people:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness

into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This language is used repeatedly throughout the Bible. God chose a people for himself, not because of anything in them but because of his good, profound, wise purposes. Apart from God's choice, we would never choose him, He always acts upon us first. Because God chooses us, he will also preserve us to the end (Philippians 1:8, Jude 24).

BECAUSE GOD GETS ALL THE GLORY

One thing that is abundantly clear in the Bible is that God is intent on getting all glory for himself. He absolutely will not allow anyone else to take credit for what he alone has accomplished.

God called the people of Israel for his glory alone. As Isaiah 43:6-7 (and many other verses) says:

I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

We see this same thing again in Ephesians 1:5-6 speaking of God's New Covenant people:

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

God does all the choosing, he does all the saving, and he gets all the glory. I did not choose God, therefore I get zero credit for saving myself. He did it all and he gets all the praise, glory, and honor.

BECAUSE IT EXPLAINS ME AND THE WORLD SO WELL

When I look at myself and look at the world, I see people who are totally depraved. Totally depraved does not mean *completely* depraved.

Someone who is completely depraved does all evil all the time. Total depravity means that every facet of our being – our thinking, our actions, our bodies, our motives – have been distorted by sin.

As it says so clearly in Romans 3:12:

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

I'm certainly not righteous. It takes me about two seconds to figure that out. And the more experience I have with people, the more I realize that no one is righteous. Every person and every thing is totally distorted by the presence of sin in the world.

I'm not a Calvinist because of my experience, but my experience certainly confirms what I see scattered broadly through the Bible. This world we live in is a damnable, wicked place.

BECAUSE I KNOW I COULDN'T HAVE CHOSEN GOD

Given what I know about the darkness in my own heart, I could not and would not have ever chosen God of my own initiative. It just wouldn't have happened. I'm too stubborn. Too self-righteous. Too self-reliant. I've got a heart of stone.

Yes, in one sense I did "choose" God, in the sense that I place my faith in Christ to save me, but I only did that after he worked upon me. God chose me, which allowed me to choose him.

This isn't some sort of, "Woe is me!" speech. This is just reality. I know that I'm cold-hearted. I know that I'm all about me. Only God could make me all about him. As Charles Spurgeon said:

I must confess I never would have been saved if I could have helped it. As long as I could, I rebelled and revolted and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray. When he would have me listen to the sound of the ministry, I would not. And when I heard, and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. Then he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort. It conquered my depraved will and made me bow myself before the sceptre of his grace.

You know, it's odd but I also see this at work in my children. They're cute, crazy, and desperately in need of Jesus. There are many times when my kids *actively* don't want to even ask God for help. They would rather me give them consequences than pray to Jesus (yeah, it gets that crazy sometimes).

I've always said that I'm a Calvinist because it's in the Bible and because I have kids [insert rimshot].

BECAUSE THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE GIVE ME GREAT COMFORT

You know what scares the *heck* out of me? The thought of falling away from Jesus. Of going apostate. To use the old summer camp language, of backsliding.

Why is this so scary? Because I know myself! I know how easily I can get sucked into sin. I've seen solid Christians completely wreck themselves upon the rocky shores of wickedness. It's a terrible, frightening thing to behold.

You know that line from "Come Thou Fount" about being "prone to wander"? That's me! This is where the doctrines of grace give me great comfort. As a Calvinist (and more importantly, Bible believer), I know that:

- I am totally depraved apart from God, unable to save myself.
- In spite of that, God called me to himself and saved me.
- In light of his unconditional calling and irresistible grace, I know that God will also cause me to persevere to the end.

This God-given perseverance is my only hope. My only hope for salvation is that God himself keeps me to the end. Thankfully, he's promised to do just that!

As Paul says in Philippians 1:6:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And again in Romans 8:30:

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God predestined, called, and justified me. He'll finish the process by glorifying me. That gives me incredible comfort.

BEING A CALVINIST ISN'T EVERYTHING

I used to think being a Calvinist was super important. Like, if you're not a Calvinist you're somehow a lesser Christian. Thankfully, I'm past that annoying/arrogant/please go away stage.

I'm grateful for the Doctrines of Grace. I believe they're very biblical. They encourage me deeply and give me hope for my future. But if you're not a Calvinist, it's cool. We can still be good friends.

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