



Calvinism – April 25, 2019
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Verses Covered

Romans 1:18

Romans 3:23

John 6:44

1 John 2:2

2 Peter 3:9

1 Timothy 1:15

Matthew 23:37 – 39

Matthew 26:24

Matthew 13:19

Matthew 22:14

Alright, boys. A little house cleaning. On May 13th, mark that night, we're going to come to my house, we're going to eat supper in the back year, free beer for the deacons. Bring your wives. Listen to them. Apparently we need to go back over the other session. So put that date down. May 13th will be at my house and we'll just have a little fellowship.

Calvinism. Now before we start today, let me share a couple of things. Nobody's settled this issue. I'm going to give you my position on it. Nobody's settled it. We've been arguing about it for 500 years, almost to the day. We have not settled it. I do not care if you're a Calvinist. Next weekend my wife and I will host all the kids who have come through Central that are senior pastors. A number of them are Calvinists. I'm speaking at Austin Stone's staff retreat next week. Matt who came out of there, the other pastor who came out of there, Halim, half the staff that came out of Central are all Calvinists. So don't misunderstand me. If you're a Calvinist, I'm fine with that as long as you're OK that I'm not. We're just not going to battle over it. We're not going to hate each other over it. We're just going to live within and understand these things. So I'm going to give you my side which I think has some validity, obviously I wouldn't hold it.

So there are a couple of things that I want you to understand. I do struggle particularly with what I would call the neo-Calvinist. There's a new group of Calvinist that are extremely strong for me, and really too far along. One of them is Mark Dever. He's a pastor in Washington D. C. Dever made the statement a while back in print that we've got to stop attacking Calvinism because every time Calvinism was attacked, the church went into decline. Which is just an asinine statement.

There are a ton of great, Godly men, John Wesley, Billy Graham, Dwight Moody. There are a ton of guys. Billy Sunday who was before Billy Graham. There are a ton of guys who are non-Calvinists who have not sent the church into decline. Then there's R. C. Sproul who is a really great writer. So as a staff we read his book on holiness. Really great book. We're working through the book together. We get to the end of the book and at the end of the book his statement was, that if you're not reformed in your theology, when you see the word reformed, that's just a code word for Calvinism, if you're not reformed in your theology, you cannot fully understand the holiness of God. That is just insane. Then you have John Piper who has come along. He's kind of the new guru, although not as strong as he was a while back. But his statement is, I'm reading, as a matter of fact, we had a big debate about it, one of the PHD seminars with these kids, and they asked him to define the good news of the scripture. You ask me to define the good news, the good news for me is that God sent Jesus, put Him on a cross, and I have forgiveness. It's not the good news for John Piper. The good news for John Piper is that the Lord God reigns. Now let me tell you something. That's not good news if you don't have a redeemer. Because if the Lord God reigns and you don't have a redeemer, and you're not right with Him, you're in a bad place. And then the other thing Piper's begun to teach is that God does really love us. He loves Himself, and then that love falls on us because it's the best thing for us. Which is never, there's not a single verse in the Bible that says God loves Himself. There are hundreds of verses in the Bible that project His love directed at us. So I struggle with neo-Calvinism.

The other thing is, I've run into a number, and one of the reasons, and I want to be careful here, we don't hire Calvinists on staff. Kind of one of our first questions when we interview a staff person. Not because we hate Calvinists, but because we've run into kind of, I want to be careful here because this is not true with everyone that holds to Calvinism. But we've run into a number of kids who hold the position of Calvinism that believe they're kind of spiritually and intellectually superior to those of us that don't. And so we don't want that driven into our place. And the other thing is, now they'll argue with me over this, and I get their argument. But the fact is, if I've got a room of children and I've got 45 children in the room and I've got a couple of kids that are just nuts; if I'm a Calvinist, my assumption is, they're probably not called of God. And so I'm not going to work with a group as hard as if I am a free will person and I think every kid's got a shot. If you're a Calvinist and you really believe what Jesus said, "Most people don't choose Him." Then when you're looking in a room of kids, the minority are coming to Christ and the majority are not. So there are some reasons why we've taken the stance as we have as a staff.

But let me walk you through. There's an acronym: T.U.L.I.P. that is really a description and the definition of Calvinism. Some of which we're going to agree with. Some of which we're not. Now T. stands for **Total Depravity**. Now let me explain what I think that means. It doesn't mean, for example, a lost person can't do good things. There are a ton of lost people that have been married for 50 years. There are lost people that have never cheated on their taxes. There are people that do not know Christ that have never molested children. There are guys that don't know Christ that have never cheated on their wives. So it's not the idea that you can't do something right. But let me walk you through a couple things. Go to Romans, chapter 1, verse 18. Listen to what he says.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their righteousness suppress the truth,

So we have this statement that God's wrath is on us. We all know Romans 3:23. Slide over there. It makes this statement.

²³all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,

So we have the fact that everybody is a sinner and everybody is under the wrath of God. That wrath is falling on you. And I'm telling you, the Greek word, I shared before, and you really can't share on a Sunday morning because it's really almost too strong, but there are a couple Greek words for anger. One is *thumos*, momentary loss of anger and then re-control. The other's *orgēs*, which is an incredibly strong word. I can't remember if it was Socrates or Aristotle, one of the two used it in the idea of I want to exact vengeance and I'm chasing after this guy to get him. That's the meaning behind the word in Romans 1:18. His wrath is on us. God is after us because of our violation of His character. And yet in that, you sense His love. There's this balance and that's why Jesus died on the cross.

Now look at John 6:44. This is why Calvinists and I for the most part get along. Now listen to what He says. Christ says:

⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

So we are depraved in the fact that we cannot save ourselves. The wrath of God is on us. And we cannot come to God on our own. Now I am a real committed believer based on John 6:44 and we've already looked at John 16 where he talks about the conviction of the Spirit. I don't think you can be saved on your own. That would be an Armenian position, so I'm not an Armenian, but I really do believe you have to be called by God. And I don't think you get many choices here. Now we don't have time to go there, but if you'll look in Matthew 13 where Christ talks about the parable of the sower, He says, if the word of the Spirits done in my life and I ignore that, then Satan takes it away. As a matter of fact, we will look at it in a second. But John 6:44 coupled with this is, I can't come to God on my own. I'm in trouble. He will draw me to Him. So for me, total depravity doesn't mean a lost person can't do good things. It does mean I cannot come to Christ on my own. I'm not going to do that. The Holy Spirit has to draw me.

Now the U stands for **Unconditional Election**. That is there is nothing I do in and of myself that causes me, causes God, to save me. This is found in Romans 9 – 11 which is kind of the Calvinist passage. My joke is, it's really the only passage they have. You can go to church all you want. It's not going to make God call you. You can read your Bible all you want, it's not going to make God call you. He calls you for two reasons: because you're in danger and He loves you. So there's this balance of God. So my election is not based on anything I do. It's based exclusively on God's call.

Now this is where the Calvinists and I part ways. They are into what they call **Limited Atonement**. That the blood of Jesus is only purposed for the elect. If you're one of the chosen of God, then the bottom line in Calvinism again, we're going to look at irresistible grace in a second here. But limited atonement is if God calls you, then He will apply the blood to you. If He does

not call you, then you don't get the blood. It is limited to those only that are elect. But I want you to look at a couple of places. Go to 1 John 2:2. Listen to what he says:

²He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Now look at 2 Peter 3:9.

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

Then look at 1 Timothy 1:15. Listen to what he writes.

¹⁵The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Then you've got our Baptist verse, John 3:16. When you put these together, I do not believe the atonement is limited and only purposed for the elect. He wants every person in the world to be atoned for. That's His call. That's His purpose. So I think this is where I part ways. And it's interesting. You'll hear a lot of Calvinists say to you, "Well, I'm a 4-Point Calvinist." What they mean is they've come to realize you can't read 1 John 2:2 and say the blood of Jesus is only applicable to those. It's offered to everybody or 1 John 2:2 makes no sense.

Now, the I is **Irresistible Grace**. That is that you cannot, if the Holy Spirit speaks to you, you cannot say no. Now slide over to Matthew. We're going to start in chapter 23, verses 37 to 39. Jesus is at the end of His life. It's right before the cross. He looks out at the capital of Israel.

³⁷"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. ³⁸See, your house is left to you desolate! ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

According to that passage, whose fault is it that Jesus wasn't able to impact Israel? Theirs. He is adamant about that. Look at Matthew 26:24. He's talking to Judas. Passover meal right before He goes into the Lord's Supper.

²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him,

But there is an adversative conjunction. This next clause is adverse to the previous clause.

²⁴The Con of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

So what is Jesus saying here? I'm going to the cross. Doesn't matter what you do or don't do. And if you do what you do, you're going to pay a price. It's an offer not to do it. It's His grace

reaching out to Judas. Then go back to Matthew 13. I referenced this a second ago. Look at Matthew 13:19.

¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

So you've got Matthew 13 and you've got this position that you can hear the Spirit speak, ignore it, and when you do that, the enemy undoes the grace that has come to you in being called to Christ. Then go back to Matthew 22:14. Now listen to what he says.

¹⁴Many are called, but few are chosen.

Now, when you put all this together, His grace is resistible. Judas is the classic example. He heard everything all those guys said, and Jesus clearly at the end says, "Dud, you don't have to do this. I'm going to the cross no matter what you do. You don't have to do this. And you're going to be in trouble if you do." I can resist His grace. That's clearly what Jesus says to Jerusalem. It's interesting to me. Every one of these are all in the book of Matthew which is a book that the tax collector wrote to convince Israel, God's chosen people, that Jesus was the Messiah. So to God's chosen people He basically says, "You are the proof that God's grace can be resisted."

And then the last is **Perseverance of the Saints**. Which is the idea that we can't lose our salvation. There are a ton of passages that indicate that. We've already looked at that. So this is generally the five things. If you're a Calvinist, now there are different branches of Calvinism. Some get really crazy as I've addressed. But, and again, for example, Mark Dever has a group of young men that he's mentored over the years called 9 Marks. Some good stuff in his 9 Marks ministry. He wrote a book called the 9 Marks of a Healthy Church. But that 9 Marks group now is moving toward accepting infant baptism, not practicing it, but accepting it. Once you start accepting it, at some point you're going to start practicing. And infant baptism is a simple no-no in scripture.

So I think they're right in the sense of Total Depravity. I think you're so bad that you'll face the wrath of God, but His love will call you. I think the Election is unconditional. I don't think you can do anything that God looks down and says, "Well I want him now because he did that." I don't think the atonement is limited. I think it's offered to the entire world. I think His grace is resistible. I do believe in the old adage, once saved, always saved. I would say, once really saved, always saved.

Now I don't have time to go into it today, I don't think. We may do that another time. I will show you something, but we don't have time to read all the scriptures, but if you go back. In Romans 9 through 11, there are two examples for the Calvinists of divine election. There's Esau and Jacob. And there is Pharaoh. Now Esau and Jacob, I don't think these are examples, Romans 9 – 11, of salvation as much as they are of purpose. Esau was not purposed by the election of God to be in the line of the Messiah. Jacob was. And so God called Jacob to be in the line. That doesn't mean Esau wasn't OK with God. As a matter of fact, after they split God blesses Esau so much that when Jacob comes back, Esau doesn't care. There's also Pharaoh. Now again, we don't have time to look at all the scriptures. But it's interesting to me. When you go back to the scriptures, it will

say specifically, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 times that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. The 7th time, it will talk about God hardening his heart. Then it shows him hardening his heart again. And then it goes back three more times to God hardening his heart. It's interesting to me because I think when you really look at what is referenced here in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus with Pharaoh, you have God saying to him, "I've got a purpose for you. I'm going to show you all sorts of miracles." But Pharaoh hardens his own heart. Then God hardens it once to kind of show Pharaoh, "I'm fixing to harden it where you don't have any chance at all." Pharaoh ignores that. Then he hardens his heart again. And then God finally says, "I'm done." And then He hardens him finally. So it's interesting when you look at the Old Testament, I don't think it fits with the Calvinists are saying in Romans.

Now let me share a couple things and I'll open it up for questions. For me, when I go to Genesis 1 through 3, I can't be a Calvinist because I think what's there is God puts us on this planet, perfect conditions, and then He does two things. He puts a tree in the middle of the garden and says, don't eat from it. And then He allows the enemy to come and tempt us. He doesn't tempt us, but He allows the temptation. I think because He wanted one being in His image that would have free will. I don't think, and if you don't believe that, if you're a Calvinist, and I've sat with several Calvinists who will say, "You have to take the position that God made them sin." To me that's a dangerous place to go. But their argument with me is always, "Well He didn't make them sin, but they were put in that position." But their argument is that God's grace is only seen greatly in contrast against man's sin. So they're going to argue that position which I just cannot go to.

Number two, if I'm a Calvinist, I'm not going to have any children. There is no guarantee your child's coming to Christ. There is no straight line from Jonathan Edwards all the way through the years. So you have no guarantee. So you can have children that God ordains He's not taking. And that's a struggle for me. That God loves my children less than I love them. So I would not have children. I remember we were discussing this at CAPS one year. Because, again, I have several young preachers that are Calvinists. And a guy looked at me and said, "Yeah, but your kids can miss Christ too." And I said, you're exactly right. But in my case, my kids miss Christ because they chose to. Not because my God wouldn't let them in. So I struggle with that position. I really, if I were a Calvinist, seriously would not have children.

The other thing, I've never met a Calvinist that didn't think he was one of the firm. When I meet a Calvinist that comes up to me one day and says, "You know, I think God fore-ordained that I'm going to Hell and I'm good with that." Then I'll probably become a Calvinist. But I've never met those. The argument that I hear is that God can't be sovereign if He gives me free will. Let me explain this, OK. Genesis 1 through 2; God's totally sovereign. Here's my deal. If God's sovereign, the definition of sovereignty is He can do anything He wants as long as it does not usurp Him from His throne. When He gives me free will in Genesis 3, that doesn't usurp Him from His throne, it gives Him from His throne a being who will choose to love Him. We made the wrong choice. God then comes along, offers us grace, we decide whether or not we want it, but even in that free will of me deciding whether or not I want the grace that He chases me down with, John 6:44, I ignore that He offered to Judas, I ignore it, He chases me down. It doesn't usurp Him from His throne because then when you come to Revelation 19 to 22, the consequences of my free will, His sovereignty control. I will go to Hell because of His sovereignty. I will go to heaven because of His sovereignty based on the free will I exercise while I was here.

Now I love, there was a guy and I really think this was correct. It's one of the other reasons why I think I struggle with Calvinism. There's a guy, Jerry Bridges, that wrote a book talking about all the trials we face in the theodicy. But he had an interesting line in the book. And I never thought about it until I read this. But he said, if you read the Bible fast, you just fly through Genesis to Revelation, you don't stop and meditate, if you read it fast, you come away with this idea of a lover who is rejected by His people and is desperate to get them back. That really is what you do find in the scripture. You have this sovereign God over Israel, but He never makes them surrender to Him. That's Jesus' point in Matthew. I don't think He makes us surrender. So I struggle, I do believe we're depraved in the sense that we can't get to heaven, can't get to Jesus without a call. I don't think I can do anything to bring my election about. I think I am going to go to heaven because I am saved. But this is where I struggle. And here's my other problem with a lot of the Calvinist who say, I'm a 4-Pointer. So they try to get out of this thing because clearly 1 John 2:2 says the atonement is for everybody. But they keep irresistible grace. Now here's the problem with that. If you believe in irresistible grace, you say, "Well I think the atonement's for everybody." That almost makes it worse for me in a sense because if you believe in irresistible grace, then if you go to Hell and grace is irresistible, why are you going to Hell? Because He didn't speak to you. He didn't call you. If grace is irresistible and you go to Hell, He chose not to call you. We're really back to limited atonement. So this is the argument. It's why I struggle. It's why we do what we do on staff. It's why we do not hire. I want a children's minister who looks out at a batch of children and thinks they all have a shot. It's probably personal for me, but I remember growing up in the home I grew up in. I was extremely angry and I was the kid that was always the problem in church. And I'm just glad that I grew up in a denomination that was predominantly believed that everybody had a shot. Because I think otherwise, my Sunday school teacher and different people would have looked at me and said, "That kid has no chance. God's not dealing with him." But that was not the position and so they worked with me. And so from a personal standpoint, I want people leading in my church who think everybody has a chance at the grace and the call of Christ.