

Calvinism vs. Biblicism vs. Arminianism

By Dr. Harlan D. Betz

Five Points of Calvinism

(Once saved always saintly)

1. Total Inability

Man is not able to respond to the grace of God. Man has no ability to come to Christ. Man cannot choose to come to Christ. God must overpower man and cause him to turn to Christ. The man who does not place his faith in Christ does not do so because he cannot do so! Man does not have the ability to respond to Christ or to come to Christ. Man cannot choose to trust in Christ. God must force man to trust in Him. Man cannot decide to come to Christ. God must make man come to Him.

2. Unconditional Election

God has elected some to go to Heaven and others to go to Hell and that election is unconditional. The decision is wholly God's. The individual has absolutely nothing to do with it. God has chosen some to be saved, and those who are saved are saved without their choosing to believe. God has determined that certain people will perish. These people were created for eternal damnation and predestined to Hell. God does not desire for them to be saved and God does not offer salvation to them.

3. Limited Atonement

Christ died only for the elect. He did not die for those He planned and ordained to go to Hell. Those who were not elected by God cannot believe and be saved. Christ did not die for those who were not elect. God did not desire for them to be saved and Christ did not die for them and salvation is not available to them.

4. Irresistible Grace

God's grace overpowers people and forces them to believe. God's grace cannot be resisted by man. Men cannot believe in Christ until after they are born again. Man is made spiritually alive by God apart from faith and before faith!

5. Perseverance of the Saints

"Once saved always saintly", that is...if a person is a believer, he will live like a godly saint, if a person does not live like a godly saint, then he is not a believer. Assurance of eternal life is not possible in this life. For the believer must endure to the end, Temporary assurance comes from the evidence of works of righteousness. If he perseveres, he is saved. If he fails to persevere, he was not truly saved in the first place.

Five Truths of the Bible

(Once saved always saved)

1. Total Depravity

Man is totally depraved. Every facet of man's nature and faculties is corrupted by the sin nature. There is nothing in man that can enable him to earn or deserve eternal life. God, in grace, draws all men (John 12:32; Titus 2:11), Man is able to receive and respond to the grace of God (Mt 23:37; John 5:24-25; Eph. 2:8-9). Man is a free moral agent with responsibility to respond to God's grace (John 1:1-9; 3:16-17). Man can respond to God's grace and come to Christ and he is called to do so (Rev. 22: 17)!

2. Unmerited Election

God elects a man without regard to that man's merit! In fact, man cannot merit God's saving grace! Election is an act of God's grace (Eph. 1:4-6). Believing is a response to God's grace. The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty in choosing and man's responsibility in believing. The Bible places foreknowledge before predestination (Rom. 8:28-30). God desires for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). God is not desirous that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9). Whosoever believes in Jesus has eternal life (John 3:16)! Men who go to Hell, go there because they are sinners who rejected God's grace.

3. Limitless Atonement

Christ died for all mankind (Is. 53:6; John 4:14, 42; 1 Tim. 2:3,6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). His death is sufficient for all, but efficient only for those who believe (John 3:15-17; Rom. 4-5).

4. Instrumental Grace

God's common grace reaches all people and enables them to respond to Him (Mt 5:45; Tit 2:11; Ps. 19; Rom. 1). God, in His grace, offers salvation to all. Some resist God's grace and remain condemned (John 5:40); others respond to His grace and at the very moment they place their faith in Christ, they are made alive and have eternal life. They are saved by grace. (Eph. 2:8,9). Faith and regeneration in Christ are simultaneous (John 1: 11-13; 3: 117).

5. Preservation of The Saints

"Once saved always saved", a believer is secure because of God's preservation. If a person has placed his faith in Christ alone for salvation, he is guaranteed eternal life, regardless of what he: thinks, says, or does. If a person is a believer, he should live like it, but if he doesn't, God will discipline him. He may sin, but he is still saved (Rom, 8:31-39; Heb. 12:1-11).

Five Points of Arminianism

(While saintly still saved)

1. Partial Depravity

Man is partially depraved. He inherited pollution from Adam, but guilt was not imputed to any of Adam's descendants. Some facets of man's nature and faculties are not corrupted by the sin nature.

2. Conditional Election

God's election of a man is conditioned upon the foreseen merit of that man. God's decrees are based on foreknowledge, and election is based on foreseen faith, and reprobation is based on foreseen resistance to grace. God elects on the basis of *foreseen* faith. Election is based on man's will to believe. In effect, man's foreseen faith precedes God's election and is the basis for God's election. This makes election a response to man's faith rather than an act of God's grace.

3. Governmental Atonement

Christ died for all men and for every man, although only believers are saved. The atonement makes salvation possible for all men, although it becomes effectual only when accepted by the repentant believer. The atonement was not only unlimited, but also unnecessary. It was a way in which God chose to manifest His love. The atonement was not strictly penal or substitutionary, but was rather designed to safeguard the interests of the moral government of God.

4. Resistible Grace

There is no common grace to be distinguished from special grace. The external call of the gospel is accompanied by a universal sufficient grace, which can be resisted. The human will is viewed as one of the causes of regeneration (synergism). Repentance and faith are seen as preceding regeneration. Faith is a good work and a ground of acceptance with God. There is no imputation of righteousness to the believer.

5. Perseverance of the Saints

"While saintly still saved", that is...a believer who perseveres in his faith and works is saved only as long as he perseveres. Assurance of eternal life is not possible in this life. As long as a man lives, he may fall from grace and lose his salvation altogether. If he perseveres, he is saved. If he fails to persevere, he is no longer saved.