

## A Brief Study of Calvinism



*VS.*



# Preface

Calvinism seems to be growing in influence these days, whether it be the full "TULIP Calvinism" or some variation. "TULIP" refers to the famous Calvinist acronym which has five points:

**T**otal depravity

**U**nconditional election

**L**imited atonement

**I**rresistible grace

**P**erseverance of the saints

Through the years I have written over 350 articles ("Insights") on a wide variety of biblical topics including Calvinism.

I thought it would be good to put the Calvinism articles together in booklet form. This is not a complete systematic study of Calvinist doctrine. Rather, each "Insight" is presented to shed light on some aspect of that system.

The final page contrasts the *bad* news of TULIP with the *good* news of the Bible.

All of my "Insights," including these, can be viewed on my website: <https://insightintobibletruth.net/>

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# Are We Robots?

## (Insight #354)

**Remember the old excuse: "The devil made me do it"?** How about an even older excuse: "God made me do it"? That's as old as Adam: "The woman whom **you gave** to be with me..." (Gen. 3:12).

### God Is Sovereign



"Sovereignty" is not used in our everyday talk. In fact, the word is seldom found in most Bibles. However, it sounds very important, and so we may give it more weight than it deserves. After all, it is just a fancy term for a king in the olden days – not to be confused with the many ceremonial "kings" today. A sovereign has supreme

authority or power over a territory. A sovereign is the chief ruler, chief authority, the one with the last word. "Lord" often carries the same meaning.

In what sense is God sovereign? In the sense that He is Lord and King of the universe. He is subject to no one. He can do what He wants. Nobody can overrule Him. Psalm 115:3 says it clearly: "Our God is in the heavens. He does whatever he pleases." God is chief authority in the universe. God is supreme.

Whether speaking of earthly kings or the God of heaven, the term "sovereignty" has nothing to do with total control of everything that happens. The final authority, yes. The last word, yes. The one who causes and controls every detail? Certainly not!

God's will is **not** always done. According to 2 Peter 3:9, God "is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish." However, Jesus said that "the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter in by it" (Matt. 7:13). That's because so many people, having been given free will by the sovereign God, reject His will.

## God Gives Humans Choice

Let's visit Eden. God said, "You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). By giving Adam and Eve a command rather than forcing their will, God was giving them the power to choose. In other words, God gave them freedom of will to either obey or disobey Him. But God had the last word, He controlled the consequences!

Then there was their angry son Cain to whom God said, "If you do well, won't it be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Cain, just like his parents, was given free will to decide. Cain was **not** born totally depraved, unable to make a choice to obey God. Neither were the ancient Israelites: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, that you may live" (Dt. 30:19). God gave them a choice, just like He gives us: "He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

God being sovereign does not mean everything that happens is His will. In His sovereignty He has clearly opened a window of time when he gives mankind the choice to act contrary to His will. That's the definition of sin!

## **Choice Involves Responsibility**

The well-known Calvinist John MacArthur was asked, "How do you reconcile the duality of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? Like for example, if someone asks you 'Well, if God literally brings about everything, how can He blame me for sinning?'" MacArthur's response: "Well, I don't know the answer to that, and I've never met anybody that knows the answer to that."<sup>(1)</sup> What MacArthur should have said is, "I've never met a Calvinist that knows the answer to that."

MacArthur's difficulty in harmonizing God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is clearly the result of looking at the Bible through Calvinistic eyeglasses. The entire TULIP acronym is a denial of human responsibility. For example, consider the first point, "total depravity." To quote a Calvinist website, total depravity means that "Man is spiritually dead... unable of himself to choose spiritual good."<sup>(2)</sup> On the contrary, as we have already seen, God, in His sovereign will, has given us the freedom of choice!

MacArthur's admission of human responsibility makes no sense with Calvinism – but it makes total sense with Scripture. If God caused us to be born so depraved and dead that we are unable to choose to follow Him, then God would be responsible for our choices, not us. What an awful view of God!

## **We Are Not Robots**

The sovereign God, of His own free will, gave Adam and Eve the ability to choose. They chose to sin, and that in no way means that Adam's offspring lost the ability to choose. On the contrary, God invited Cain to rule over sin, to choose life. From Genesis to Revelation, humans are held responsible precisely

because we are not robots. Of our own free will we choose to serve God or to serve self. Whether in the Bible or out of the Bible, the word "sovereignty" does not mean – and never did mean – absolute control of everything that happens. God was **not** in control of Adam's and Cain's decisions. He **was** in control of the consequences in both cases.

God wants us to serve Him, but He does not force us. He gives us the choice. His desire and offer that all men would yield to Him is lovingly displayed in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem just days before they crucified Him: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37). Jesus longed to hold them close in love, but they "would not." He did not coerce them; they were not robots. Nor are we. We must reject every doctrine that – like Adam's excuse – blames God for our choices!

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(1) YouTube: "Pastor John MacArthur on God's sovereignty and man's responsibility"

(2) [fivesolas.com/tulipscriptures.htm](https://fivesolas.com/tulipscriptures.htm)



## God's Will – Romans 9

(Insight #351)

### **Does Romans 9 teach unconditional election to salvation?**

We need to understand the context first. Keep in mind that this letter was not written to a modern Gentile-only church. A major portion of the book of Romans addressed the Jewish mindset which rejected Gentiles being saved through Christ. They believed that only descendants of Abraham were God's people.

## I. God Chooses Whom He Wants



After expressing his great love for his physical kinsmen (Rom. 9:1-5), in verses 6-13 Paul reminded them that not all of Abraham's offspring were God's people. Ishmael (implied) and Esau were not chosen. Isaac and Jacob

(Israel) were chosen. These examples showed that "it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise." No Jew could deny that.

The election of Jacob over Esau when "being not yet born... the purpose of God according to election... [etc.]" is *not* talking about personal eternal salvation. God had told Rebekah that "two nations are in your womb..." (Gen. 25:23). Nations! In Romans 9:13, Paul quoted part of Malachi 1:1-4, a text clearly about the *nations* of Esau (Edom) and Jacob (Israel). In short, in Romans 9:6-13 Paul reminded his fellow Jews that their nation had been God's chosen (elect) people because God wanted them to be.

## II. God Does What He Wants

To further emphasize God's will, in Romans 9:14-21 Paul used the examples of Pharaoh and a potter to drive home the point that God "has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires." God used Pharaoh to bring glory to Himself. Any Jew also knew that Pharaoh was obstinate from the beginning, and behind it all was God's will and desire to free Israel from slavery.

Paul then turns to a potter – a strong case of God doing whatever He wants. "Hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?" (9:21). Notice that the text does *not* say that God's (the potter's) will is unconditional, as in "unconditional election." God is sovereign, he can elect unconditionally or with conditions. In the potter analogy as seen in Jeremiah 18:1-10, it is clear that how God treats the clay is based conditionally on the behavior of the nation: "If that nation... turns from their evil..." Yes, God elects whom He wants to elect – but He often elects to impose conditions and, in His sovereignty, decides to allow man to choose.

### **III. What Does God Want Today?**

Romans 9:6-21 is not about personal eternal salvation. But verses 22-32 are! We need to consider the first part of Romans 9 together with the last part, or we will miss the whole point. In Romans 9:6-21, Paul used earthly-national-temporal examples (which Jews knew well) to press home the truth that God can do whatever He wants to do. Then in verses 22-32, Paul applied that truth to the issue of individual-eternal salvation. The whole point of Romans 9 is that Jewish ethnicity no longer makes a person chosen by God. Now that Jesus has come into the world (through the Jews), it is God's will to save both Jews and Gentiles – *if* they put their faith in Jesus Christ.

In Romans 9:24-32, Paul emphasized the point that God has "called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles... that the Gentiles... attained to righteousness... but Israel... didn't... Why? Because they didn't seek it by faith." Far from being about unconditional election, Romans 9 teaches the opposite: that today the condition of salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. All of Romans 9 is an extended defense (addressed to

Jews) of Paul's basic proposition in the beginning of the letter: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek" (1:16).

## Romans 9 in a Nutshell

To paraphrase Romans 9: "Listen, brother Jew, whom I love deeply. Centuries ago, God by His will chose you as His elect people. But now that Christ has come into the world through you, God chooses, elects, and has mercy on those who believe in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Who are you to argue with God?"



# Predestination

(Insight #355)

**Does the Bible teach "predestination"?** Yes, it does! However, a more meaningful reply to that question requires some investigation.

## Unconditional Election?



The Calvinistic view of predestination is expressed in the "U" of TULIP: "unconditional election." This doctrine states that before creation, God elected and predestined specific individuals for salvation. It further states that the

election and predestination were not based on any foreseen

conditions whatsoever of what each individual might or might not do in their lifetime.

To begin with, this doctrine is questionable for the simple reason that almost no Bible translation even once contains the word "unconditional." To the contrary, all Bible translations are full of words expressing conditions regarding salvation – words such as "if," "unless," "or else," "must," "choose," and "because." Consider this sample of examples:

Josh. 24:15: "choose today..."

Matt. 6:15: "if you don't forgive..."

John 3:3: "unless one is born anew..."

Acts 5:29: "We must obey God..."

Rom. 11:22: "if you continue..."

Rev. 2:16: "Repent therefore, or else..."

Rev. 3:16: "because you are lukewarm..."

## **What Was Predestined?**

The NT word usually translated "predestined" is from the Greek "proorizō" (Strong's G4309), which is in the NT only six times. The meaning of the Greek is very simple: "to decide beforehand."

Before examining the idea of personal predestination, let's consider predestined *events*. God "decided beforehand" that Jesus would die for our sins, as expressed by the Apostles in prayer: "Pontius Pilate... and the people of Israel... to do whatever your hand and your council predestined [G4309] to happen" (Acts 4:27-28). On Pentecost, Peter declared the same truth in similar words: Jesus "being delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed" (Acts

2:23). Jesus' death was determined by God beforehand. His death for us was predestined.

In addition, Paul spoke of the wisdom "which God predestined [G4309] before the worlds" (1 Cor. 2:7). This reminds us of what Jesus told the Apostles after His resurrection: "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations" (Luke 24:46-47). In His wisdom God predestined that repentance and forgiveness of sins based on the death and resurrection of Jesus be preached to the entire world. The gospel, God's power to save mankind, was God's plan before humans ever existed. It was predestined!

## **Who Is Predestined?**

With these truths in mind, we come to the other four times that the word "predestined" (G4309) is found in the NT:

Rom. 8:29: "For whom [plural] he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."

Rom. 8:30: "Whom [plural] he predestined, those he also called..."

Eph. 1:5: "Having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ..."

Eph. 1:11: "We were also assigned an inheritance in him, having been predestined..."

First of all, let's notice that the four verses just quoted make no mention of single individuals. Rather, they are all about the predestination of a group: "whom" (plural in the Greek), "us" and "we." In addition, as discussed above, the Bible clearly teaches that there are conditions for salvation, and even Calvinists admit that the Bible teaches human responsibility (see Insight #354). With all these truths in mind, we must

conclude that God predestined that there would be a *group* of people saved eternally, based on conditions that he also predetermined. In the four verses quoted, this group obviously includes Paul, the writer, and the Christians to whom he is writing. This group is "the church of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

God predestined that there would be a group of saved people. He did not unconditionally predestine the individuals who would be in that group. Rather, God predestined the preaching of the gospel to be "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Each one of us must individually decide whether or not we will submit to be included in God's predestined plan.

## **The Predestined Gospel Invitation**

From Genesis to Revelation, God pleads with us to give our lives to Him, not to self nor Satan. He predestined Jesus' death to make it possible for us to live eternally with Him. It is very true that nobody deserves or can earn salvation. But there *are* conditions. "Now He [God] commands that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). "Know certainly that God has made Him [Jesus] both Lord and Christ... Repent, and be baptized... Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" (Acts 2:36-40).



## **Are We Born Sinners?** (Insight #259)

**Do I believe in original sin?** Absolutely. I believe the Bible account that Adam and Eve committed the original sin of the

human race. I have my own sins, but if I was born a sinner, it wasn't *the original sin*, was it? Leaving the term "original" behind, let's just examine this question: Are we all born guilty of sin?



## **Practical Before Theoretical**

Let's start on the practical side. If it is true that we all are born guilty of sin inherited from Adam, what can we do about it? How can a little child erase the guilt? Does the Bible answer this? Some religions say, "Yes, the Bible gives the solution; the answer is to baptize the baby shortly after birth." Is that true?

God's Word says:

Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved."

Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized."

Acts 2:41: "Those who gladly received his word were baptized."

Acts 18:8: "They heard, believed and were baptized."

These texts show hearing, believing, and repenting as preceding baptism. Therefore, they cannot be applied to infants. There is no Scripture that shows baptism taking place before hearing, believing, and/or repenting.

How about "household baptisms"? In the first place, who of us does not know many households that have no small children? An oft-cited case is the household of the Philippian jailer. Acts says that he "was immediately baptized, he and all his household." Praise the Lord! Who made up that household? We are not told, so this presents zero evidence that infants were included. And notice the context: "They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' They spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all

who were in his house. He... was immediately baptized, he and all his household" (Acts 16:31-33). Did you notice? The first thing mentioned to the household was that they must believe. That eliminates newborns. Secondly, "They spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his house." Can you speak the word of the Lord to infants? Let's be real. This household example is clearly another example of hearing and believing before being baptized.

In short, even if infants are born with sin, the Bible offers no "solution" to the "problem."

## **Distinguishing Between Consequences and Guilt**

It is one thing to say that the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin have passed down to us. Guilt for their sin is a different story.

You may know someone who was killed by a drunken driver. Clearly that person suffered the consequences of the drunkard's sin, not the guilt. How many millions in Syria today are suffering the consequences of the sins of a few! A person may repent of smoking yet still die of lung cancer because of the damage done.

The case of David and Bathsheba is enlightening. When David finally repented of his sin, the prophet Nathan told him, "Jehovah also has put away your sin. You will not die. However... the child... shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:13-14). Not only that, but "the sword will never depart from your house... I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun" (vss. 10-11). God forgave David, but David still had to suffer severe consequences.

Scripture says: "As in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). This famous resurrection chapter is about physical death and resurrection from beginning to end. "Christ died for our sins... was buried... was raised on the third day." "At the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed" (vss. 3-4, 52). And read the immediate context: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead... For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ's, at his coming" (vss. 20-23). It's about physical death coming from Adam to "all," and resurrection coming to "all" because of Jesus. It's about the consequences of Adam's sin, not about our personal guilt.

## **Did Jesus Inherit Adam's Sin?**

"The Word became flesh... born of the seed of David according to the flesh... Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same... he gives help to the seed of Abraham. Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers... every spirit who doesn't confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist" (John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; Heb. 2:14-17; 1 John 4:3).

If the whole human race inherits Adam's sin, then Jesus inherited Adam's sin. If all humans are born with sin, Jesus was born with sin. If all babies are guilty before God, the baby Jesus was guilty before God. Who can believe it! And if someone denies that Jesus came in the same flesh as us, "this is the spirit of the Antichrist."

In high school, a friend directed me to Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me." But whether David is speaking of his mother or of the world in general, he says he was "in iniquity. In sin." He doesn't say that sin was in him. If this verse means that David was born a sinner, then Jesus was born a sinner.

The church of Rome fully recognizes this dilemma. So, they invented a "solution" called the "Immaculate Conception." The Catholic Encyclopedia says: "In the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December, 1854, Pius IX pronounced and defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary 'in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.' " In short, the "solution" was to have Mary born without original sin, so that Jesus could be born without original sin.

Rome realizes, more clearly than many Protestants, that Jesus becoming flesh forces us to deny that humans are born with the guilt of Adam's sin.

## **What About Romans 5?**

The Apostle Peter said that "Paul... wrote to you; as also in all of his letters... there are some things that are hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Agreed! Surely, the second half of Romans 5 is one of those sections "hard to understand." I do not claim to have the final word, but here are a few of my thoughts.

Verse 18 says, "So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life." What is this that "all men were justified to life"? Who but a universalist would claim all men are justified in

the sense of being forgiven of sins with resulting eternal life? What does it mean then? That takes me back to 1 Cor. 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." As far as our physical bodies are concerned, because of Adam "all die," and because of Christ "all" will one day live again.

Also, consider verse 12: "Sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned." How are we to understand "all sinned"? First notice that it does not say "all do sin," or "all will sin," much less "all inherit sin," but rather "all sinned," past tense. I believe that Hebrews 7:9-10 can help us here: "We can say that through Abraham even Levi, who receives tithes, has paid tithes, for he was yet in the body of his father when Melchizedek met him." Levi is spoken of as being in the body of his great-grandfather. The argument is that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek via his great-grandfather. A stretch? Yes, but an inspired stretch. I believe that is what we have in Rom. 5:12. We all sinned because we all were in Adam's body when he sinned. Or, to look at it another way, when Adam sinned, "all sinned," because he represented the entire human race. Adam and Eve were the whole human race at the time, so the whole human race ("all") sinned. Death was a punishment for the whole human race.

I think that striving to grasp verses 18 and 12, and then applying that viewpoint to the balance of the verses can help to unravel the entire section. In any case, it is a difficult text. If the text teaches that all humans inherit Adam's sin and are guilty, then Jesus inherited Adam's sin and was guilty at birth. God forbid.

## **We Are Responsible For Ourselves**

"Yet you say, Why doesn't the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son has done that which is lawful and right,

and has kept all my statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins, he shall die: **the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father**, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him" (Eze. 18:19-20).

"**He who** believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

"So then each one of us will give account **of himself** to God" (Rom. 14:12).

"God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through **our trespasses**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5).

"Each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by **his own lust**, and enticed. Then the **lust, when it has conceived, bears sin**" (James 1:14-15).

"**He who desires**, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).



## **We Were Dead?** (Insight #350)

"**You were dead,**" Paul told his beloved brothers and sisters in **Ephesus** (Eph. 2:1). He referred, of course, to their lives before conversion. What did Paul mean by "dead"?

## Lazarus vs. the Prodigal Son



Calvinism says that just as dead Lazarus could not obey Jesus' command to come out of the tomb until Jesus gave him life, so we totally depraved humans are not able to obey God's commands to believe and repent unless He first supernaturally gives us life.

The example of a physically dead Lazarus is not a proper analogy to use here. The parable of the prodigal son is. When the son returned home, his father twice said that he "was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:24, 32). While he was "dead," "he came to himself" (verse 17). Living a wicked life (being "dead") did not prevent him from changing his mind. He repented and returned home. Spiritual death in no way rules out the ability to change one's mind, to repent.

### What Is Death?

James tells us: "As the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead" (2:26). "Apart from." Death is separation! When the spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. When faith has no works, the faith is dead, useless.

The NT uses the word "death" in various spiritual-figurative ways:

"Dead *in* transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

"Dead *to* sin" (Rom. 6:11).

"Dead *to* the law" (Rom. 7:4).

"*Put to death*... sexual immorality... [etc.] (Col. 3:5).

We were dead *in* sins because "your iniquities have separated you and your God" (Isa. 59:2). We "died to sin" in baptism and "he who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:2-3, 7). Spiritual-figurative death is all about separation, whether from good or from evil. It has nothing to do with inability or supposed total depravity.

## **Change Your Mind**

Calvinism sees death as inability in Rom. 8:7: "The mind of the flesh is hostile toward God; for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be." This text is about a person's mindset. Just two verses earlier, Paul wrote, "Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." It's not an inability issue; it's a lifestyle and mindset issue.

Carnal people can and should change their minds, just like the "dead" prodigal son who "came to himself." It's called repentance. God "commands that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). We must periodically evaluate our fleshly mindset and change and renew it as necessary. Christians are told: "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you died... Put to death therefore..." (Col. 3:2-5). And again, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

## **Repent!**

Death in a spiritual-figurative sense is not about inability; it is about separation, whether separation from God or separation from sin. The inability of the fleshly mind to repent is not about people's total inability; it is about their inability *as long as* they maintain a fleshly mindset. God calls us to change our

mindset, to repent. "The Lord... is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish. but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).



## How Does God Draw Us? (Insight #349)

**Jesus once told His followers,** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). How does God draw us to Jesus?



### "Draw Us?"

That verse doesn't explain it. But Calvinism "draws" us into the Greek meaning of "draw" ("elko," Strong's #G1670).

Calvinism points out that in Acts 16:19; 21:30; and James 2:6 the "drawing" is clearly people "drawing" other people by force. For that reason, nearly all versions translate "elko" in those verses as "drag." "There you have it," says Calvinism; "John 6:44 teaches that divine compulsion is required to remove a person's 'total depravity.' Only then, can one be capable of coming to Jesus."

But wait a minute. Just as the English word "draw" has many shades of meaning, so does the Greek word. Greek lexicons give a range of meanings to "elko," from "influence-attract" to "drag-compel" depending on the context. Thus, while nearly all versions render "elko" as "drag" in some verses, the same versions render it as "draw" in John 6:44. No version renders it

as "drag" or "compel" in that verse. Not only that, but Scripture even promises: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

## **The Missing Verse**

The verse containing "elko" that is *not* mentioned in this Calvinist view is actually the most helpful verse. While John 6:44 offers no explanation as to *how* God draws people to Jesus, John 12:32 does! Jesus said "'I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' But he said this, signifying by what kind of death he should die." Of course, since the Father and the Son are one, and since the Father sent the Son to die for us, the Father drawing and the Son drawing are all one and the same.

Jesus predicted that His death would "draw all people" to Himself. Fantastic prediction! "All people," that is, innumerable multitudes of all nationalities, races, social levels, etc. Who is not drawn by the fantastic love of the Son of God hanging on the cross for us! Imagine. We even joyfully sing about His death, His cross, His blood. A favorite song even says the cross "has a wondrous *attraction* for me." Precisely what Jesus predicted. Compare that to Romans 2:4: "The goodness of God leads you to repentance." Compare it to 1 John 4:19: "We love him, because he first loved us." God doesn't force us with "irresistible grace" as Calvinism says. No. His goodness, His love, His dying Son upon the cross attract and draw us to Jesus.

## **The Missing Context**

As we began, Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." How? In the very next verse,

Jesus continued: "It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who hears from the Father and has learned, comes to me." Put the two verses together. How does someone come to Jesus? By listening to God's prophets and learning from them. As Paul later wrote, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

How are we drawn by God? Scripture nowhere says it is by a supernatural act of God to change a supposed totally depraved nature. Rather, Jesus says it is by listening to God and learning from Him. God draws us to Jesus when we listen, read, study, believe, and follow God's Word, the Bible. It is there that we learn of His Son on the cross and are drawn to Him.

## **The Takeaway**

Citing John 6:44, Calvinism teaches that God divinely compels those whom He has chosen to come to Him. However, John 6:44 does not tell us *how* God draws us to Jesus. Verse 45 tells us that the way we come to Jesus is by opening our ears and listening to God's Word. Other verses tell us that we are drawn to God by His goodness, especially being attracted by the amazing love we see in Jesus dying upon the cross for our sins.



# **Did Jesus Die for You?**

(Insight #352)

**One day Calvina told her neighbor,** "I'm so thankful Jesus died for me, but I don't know if He died for you or not." A fake comment to be sure, but it truthfully portrays Calvinism's

teaching via the third TULIP item: "limited atonement." But what does the Bible say?



### **John 3:16**

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." In light of this great verse, how can anybody claim

that Jesus died for only a limited number of people?

The word "world" (Strong's #G2889: "kosmos") does have various meanings. It sometimes means our planet. It sometimes means all people. It sometimes means a limited group of people.

Calvinism claims that "world" in John 3:16 refers to a limited group of people, namely "God's elect." However, this is totally contrary to Jesus' meaning of "world" when used for a limited group. This is most clearly seen when Jesus speaks of the "world" *in contrast to* His disciples. Notice these examples in the Gospel of John:

14:16-17: [that God would give the disciples] "the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive."

15:18: "The world hates you."

16:19-20: [regarding His death]: "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice."

17:9: "I pray for them [disciples]. I don't pray for the world."

Calvinism's attempt in John 3:16 to limit "world" to "God's elect" is the exact opposite of Jesus' use of the word. There is no getting around the wonderful truth of John 3:16: Jesus died

for you and me and everybody else – He died for the whole world.

## How Limited?

But let's be clear. Jesus' blood shed on the cross *is* limited in one sense. John 3:16 clearly says the *benefits* of Jesus' death are for those who believe. Contrary to Calvinism's "unconditional election," the sovereign God has placed a condition on receiving the benefits of the atonement. This condition is repeated three times within four verses of John 3: 3:15: "... whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

3:16: "... whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

3:18: "... he who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed..."

Another way Calvinism attempts to uphold their teaching is by adding "only" to selected texts. As one example, here is a Calvinist quote: "The Bible says that Christ laid down His life for His sheep, and only them. John 10:11." That is a lie. John 10:11 does *not* say "and only them."

Yes, Jesus died for His sheep. But the Apostle John directly contradicts those who add "only" to such texts: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). "Not for ours only"! The distinction between "ours" and the "world" is that the cleansing blood is *available* to "the whole world," but the ones who *benefit* are those who accept Jesus as their Shepherd. And the Shepherd himself said, "He who believes and is baptized will

be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

## It's Our Choice

Sad but true, here is the dark side of Calvinism (paraphrasing John 3:16 according to their doctrine):

>>For God so hated most of the world, that he refused to give His Son for their salvation. Rather, He created them totally depraved and incapable of believing in Jesus. Thus they shall perish eternally with no opportunity for salvation.<<

This is in direct contradiction to the clear teaching of the entire New Testament, which closes with this invitation: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' He who hears, let him say, 'Come!' He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). Amen.



## Faith (Insight #356)

**Which comes first?** second? third? – repentance, faith, hearing, baptism, new birth, salvation, confession, preaching, receiving Jesus, or what? Well, that depends upon whom you listen to.

## What Calvinism Says

According to the deceased Calvinist R. C. Sproul, "If there's one phrase that captures the essence of reformed theology, it is the little phrase, regeneration precedes faith."



"Regeneration" is a fancy word for "new birth." Sproul said a person is born again before believing. The Calvinistic doctrine is that "rebirth" transforms a person from being unable to believe the gospel (total depravity) to being unable to resist the gospel (irresistible grace).

Intimately connected with this idea is the concept that salvation is the work of God alone – not a cooperation of man and God. They say that just as we had no part in our first (physical) birth, so we have no part in our second (spiritual) birth. Calvinism teaches that faith is a gift which God supernaturally gives only to the ones He has first supernaturally regenerated.

## **Source of New Birth**

According to the Bible, what is the source of the new birth? Peter describes the source this way: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). Jesus taught the same in a parable: "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). God's Word planted in a heart produces new life.

James taught the same truth: "Of his own will he gave birth to us by the word of truth" (James 1:18). The new birth is not the result of some secret personal miracle of God. Rather, it is the result of God's Word working in a person's heart.

Paul told the Corinthian brethren: "For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers:

for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). Yes, God causes the new birth, but in His sovereignty He predestined the preaching of the gospel to be the seed for the new birth. Paul was their father – he begot them – because he planted the seed of the gospel in their hearts.

Thus we see that Scripture uses two analogies when talking about the new birth, and both involve seed: you plant a seed to get a new plant; a child is begotten when the male plants the seed. In both cases when talking about the new birth, Scripture says that the gospel is the seed. That's why Paul proclaimed to the Romans: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The power of God that leads to salvation is *not* a private miracle with no human agent. Quite the contrary, God's power will work in us for salvation when we allow the seed to germinate and grow.

## Source of Faith

Now let's consider the source of faith. One of the clearest statements is from John telling why he wrote his Gospel: "These [Jesus' signs] are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:30-31). In simple terms for us today: God's written word, the Bible, is the source of faith.

Paul gives us more details about how this process works: "'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher?... **faith comes by hearing**, and hearing by **the word of God**" (Rom. 10:13-17).

Calvinism quotes Ephesians 2:8-9: "saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." There it is. Faith is a gift. Or is it? Let's get the context. Paul had been talking about the change from our lost estate to being saved. How? "By grace you have been saved" (2:5). Amen! Then, Paul repeats that truth and adds to it: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God..." (2:8). What is God's gift? Salvation by grace through faith.

## **Faith a Condition for New Birth**

We have seen that the source of both new birth and faith is the Word of God. Now let's see that the Bible does *not* teach that the new birth precedes faith (as Calvinism teaches). Rather, it teaches the exact opposite: that faith is a necessary precondition for new birth (regeneration) to take place. Let's finish a previous incomplete quote: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God for salvation [for whom?] **for everyone who believes**" (Rom. 1:16).

And completing another verse: "These [Jesus' signs] are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God [**why?**], and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Earlier I also quoted that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Just a few verses before that, it says, "For with the heart, one believes resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:10). Faith and confession are conditions that result in salvation.

Notice also these texts: "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save [whom?] those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). "For you are all children of God, [how?]

through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). It's clear. It is "through" (by means of) faith that people are born again, thus becoming children of God.

These verses are in full agreement with Jesus' command before ascending into heaven: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). As a result of believing, some will be baptized and be saved; as a result of *not* believing, some will be condemned.

It is true that when Jesus spoke of new birth in the beginning of John 3, He did not mention faith. But no single context ever says everything. And notice that in the same chapter we have one of the most famous verses in the Bible: "...that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (3:16)." In addition, just two chapters earlier, the Holy Spirit had this to say: "But as many as received him [Jesus], to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Nobody without God, of their own free will, can be born again – no matter how much they change their life on their own. New birth is God's work. But the text says that the "right" to be born as God's children is for those who receive and believe in Jesus. We cannot regenerate ourselves, but God requires our faith in Jesus before He will regenerate us.

## **Which Comes First?**

Faith is *not* a supernatural mysterious thing that God implants in the mind and heart without a person's desire. Yes, faith is

from God – but via His Word. Any faith that is not based on God's written Word is manmade, if not Satan-made.

None of us can cause ourselves to be born anew. But the right to be born again is for those who say to God, "Lord, I can't give myself new birth. Rather, I believe you can do it through your grace and the blood of your Son Jesus." Such faith not only *precedes* new birth – it is *required* for new birth.

The famous Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Did Paul respond, "There is nothing you can do; you must just wait and hope you are one of the elect; it's all up to God"? *No way!* What Paul and Silas did respond to the "do" question was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31).



## **"Eternal Security – Once Saved, Always Saved"** (Insight #246)

**What a wonderful, comforting promise!** Once I am in Jesus, I can never be lost. If I accept Jesus Christ as my Savior, I am forever saved. No matter what happens in my life, good or bad, I cannot lose my salvation. I am secure for eternity.

But is this wonderful promise from God or from men? Do you remember when the serpent promised Eve: "You surely will not die"? But she did die! We must investigate the source of the promises we are offered.

Listen to the prophet Ezekiel: "The soul who sins will die... When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die" (18:4, 24). If the righteous man turns away from his righteousness, he will die as a sinner.



## **Reasons to Reject "Eternal Security"**

Someone will say, "That was under the Old Testament, before Jesus died to save us by His love, blood, and grace." That is very true, but listen to the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 10:26-29: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

This Scripture describes those who "go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth." Not just heard it; not just believed it; they received it. They received Jesus, who is the truth. Even more clearly, it says they were "sanctified." Not just knowing the truth. They were sanctified, cleansed, forgiven, saved. They received Christ and were saved, but later on they

willfully sinned. Yes, things *are* different under the New Testament. The punishment for backsliding Christians is *worse* than the punishment was for Jews who backslid! "Severer punishment." Why? Because there is no greater love than God giving His only Son to save us by his blood and grace. When a person sins willfully who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." That once-saved person became lost.

Hebrews says, "if we go on sinning willfully." God has given us a will. We do not lose our will when we are born again. Nobody can force me to become a Christian. And nobody can force me to remain a Christian. Not even God. In both cases, it is a matter of choice, of free will. "Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17). And, it is still a matter of our will after we are sanctified. Christians can "go on sinning willfully" and look forward to "the fury of a fire," the lake of fire.

Listen to what the apostle Peter, by the Holy Spirit, says: "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire' " (2 Pet. 2:20-22). You cannot escape the pollutions of the world by simply reforming your life. You are still in your sins until Jesus cleanses and saves you. It also speaks of "a sow, after washing." As we sing, true to the Scripture, "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." So, here are saved people who return to their former life. Are they still saved? On the contrary, "the last state

has become worse for them than the first." Ever see a dog lick up its own vomit? Disgusting! That is the picture of a person once-saved-now-lost.

## **Arguments in Favor of "Eternal Security"**

Someone will say, "Once a son, always a son; you may be a bad son, but you are still a son, and your inheritance is secure." But what does the parable of the prodigal son teach? Yes, he was a son and he even received his inheritance from his father. However, he left home. His father did not force him to stay. Some time later, the son woke up spiritually and returned home, confessing his sins. His father received him with great joy. But what was the state of that son before he returned home? Listen to the father: "For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:24). Until the son returned home, he was "lost" and "dead." He was still a son, but he was a lost son!

Someone else will quote what Jesus said on another occasion: "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). A wonderful promise of security in Jesus. But did you notice that Jesus did not say that the saved person will not be able to jump out of his hand? Rather, he was saying that no third person will have the power to snatch a saved person from Jesus' hand. Remember when "many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66)? No one forced them to leave Jesus. But neither did Jesus force them to stay.

Another person points to the oft-repeated promise of now having eternal or everlasting life, such as 1 John 5:13: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son

of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." It does not say that you will get eternal life. It says they "have eternal life," present tense. It is already a possession. I assume anyone would agree that having eternal life and having one's name written in the book of life are two ways of saying the same thing. Now notice Rev. 3:5: "He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life." Overcoming is a condition for not having our name erased from the book of life. You can have your name in the book of life and later have it removed.

Should I even mention the argument sometimes used when a Christian turns away from Christ? It is said that their later state is proof that they were not saved to begin with. Of course, there is no Scripture to be quoted to uphold this cop-out. On the contrary, the Bible is filled with exhortations for Christians to continue in the way of Christ their entire life. "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life... He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:10-11). "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). "The gospel... by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2). Scripture says we must "hold fast." Otherwise, we believed in vain -- it did us no good to be saved.

We must not abuse the grace of God: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12). Grace is not license. Grace teaches us to live holy lives. Hebrews has already told us that those who turn back to their sinful life after being saved have "insulted the Spirit of grace." They abuse grace; they do not understand what grace is all about.

## **A Vital Point**

Before moving on, a very important clarification must be made. This whole matter is not just a question of refuting a false doctrine taught by some churches, whether the teaching be called perseverance of the saints, eternal security, or once-saved-always-saved. This issue is a very personal matter. It must be recognized that there are Christians in churches which reject this doctrine, who yet live as if the doctrine were true. The whole question is not just a matter of teaching sound doctrine; it is a vital personal question of our attitude toward our daily walk with the Lord.

## **How Are We Saved in the First Place?**

Grace leads to another question. How is grace first applied to our lives? It is one thing to question if a saved person is saved forever. Of at least equal importance, we must ask: How is a person saved in the first place? If a person is not saved in the first place, he/she cannot remain saved. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus promised: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). A few weeks later, the apostle Peter, baptized in the Holy Spirit, told the multitudes: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). All too often today, these texts are missing from tracts and sermons on salvation. Only verses about faith are quoted, and then people are invited to "pray this prayer." Sad to say, much of the religious world has emptied baptism of its true significance and has substituted a prayer as being the moment sins are forgiven.

All too often, sinners are promised that via a prayer for salvation they are saved and will never be lost. But we must

ask, "Where in the Bible do we find a lost sinner receiving salvation through prayer?" 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins." But this promise is addressed to Christians, not to sinners. As for the salvation of sinners, the case of Saul of Tarsus (Paul) is extremely instructive. He had a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, but he was not saved there. Rather, when Paul asked Jesus what he should do, the Lord replied: "Get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do" (Acts 9:6). In Damascus, he prayed and fasted for three days, but he was not yet saved. Rather, the Lord sent Ananias to him (Acts 9:9-16). When Ananias came to Paul, among other things, he exhorted him, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). Call on the Lord, yes -- at baptism. Having a vision of Jesus did not save Paul. Prayer and fasting did not save Paul. Paul's sins were not washed away until he was baptized, calling on the Lord. Can it be any different with you and me?

Two false promises wrapped up together. People are promised salvation through a prayer, and they are promised that after the prayer they can never be lost. It is time for people to open their Bible -- all of it, not just a favorite verse -- and find out for themselves what God really promises us. It is time to become like the Bereans who "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Study the book of Acts to see what it tells the lost sinner to do about faith (belief), repentance, baptism, and prayer. Study Paul's letters to the churches to see how saved Christians are to live their lives. Nobody can earn salvation. Nobody deserves salvation. But neither can anybody live any way they want to live and still claim the grace of God.

Scripture quotations [in this Insight] taken from the [NASB](#).



# Good News vs. Bad News

## (Insight #360)

**"Gospel" means "Good News."** Ever since Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), the Good News of salvation through Jesus has been offered to the entire world.

It is true that the Good News includes bad news. Before ascending, Jesus declared, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). That's Good News and bad news in the same breath. The Good News is that each individual has a choice. There is a way to be saved. We are all condemned sinners, separated from God – but through Jesus, almighty God is offering us salvation, escape from damnation. We can escape the bad news by accepting the good news.

Not so with Calvinism. According to Calvinism, God from eternity has committed the vast majority of humanity to damnation – and there is absolutely nothing anybody can do about it. According to Calvinism, God eternally damned most people before they were even born.

While TULIP is comforting to those who *imagine* they were eternally predestined by God for salvation, it is devastating to those whom God supposedly predestined to damnation with no opportunity offered to repent and yield to God. That's the bad news of TULIP for those God supposedly rejected from all eternity.

Here's the bad news of Calvinism, which they clearly teach, even if they don't emphasize it. This is TULIP for the vast majority of people, with no opportunity to escape:



**T**otal depravity forever  
**U**nconditional rejection  
**L**eft out of the atonement  
**I**rredeemably condemned  
**P**erpetual inescapable damnation

That's not the Gospel (Good News). It's *bad* news. In fact, it's *fake news*.

- The true Good News tells of the loving "God our Savior, who *desires* all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3-4).
- The Good News is that "Now he [God] commands that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). A command offers a choice, an opportunity.
- The Good News is that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that *whoever* believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
- The Good News is that "*He who* believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).
- The Good News is that "the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'... He who is thirsty, let him come. He *who desires*, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

