

Calvinism

John Calvin
Calvinism
Total Inability
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Infallible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

By: Allan McNabb
allan@biblestudyguide.org

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Introduction

God's word is perfect, but men are fallible. If you find any errors in these articles or have suggestions to improve them, please contact me at allan@biblestudyguide.org.

This series of short articles deals with the doctrines of Calvinism in brief easy-to-understand responses from God's word. The objective of these articles is to equip the reader with the Scriptures that refute Calvin's false doctrines.

Allan McNabb

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Who was John Calvin?

John Calvin was one of the (if not the) most prominent theologians of the Protestant Reformation. He was born in France on July 10, 1509 and died in Geneva on May 27, 1564.

Calvin began studying to become a Catholic priest. But being more interested in law and the humanities, he was not ordained. On November 1, 1533, Calvin gave a speech attacking the Catholic Church and calling for reforms. From that time forward, he became the most influential Reformation theologian. Today, most (if not all) Protestant denominations adhere to Calvin's doctrines to some degree.

While Calvin was in Geneva, the Reformed Churches (Presbyterian) accepted his doctrine as though they were infallible. Calvin is, therefore, known as the founder of the Reformed Churches (Presbyterian Church).

What is Calvinism?

John Calvin's five main doctrines were adopted as the foundation of the Reformed system of doctrine. They are conveyed in the acronym "TULIP":

- **Total inability** (total hereditary depravity, original sin): man is totally depraved, the guilt of sin passes from generation to generation originating with Adam.
- **Unconditional election** (predestination): God has predestined certain people to be saved.
- **Limited atonement**: Christ died only for the people who had been predestined.
- **Infallible grace** (irresistible grace): the Holy Spirit operates directly upon people, who have been predestined, to convert them.
- **Perseverance of the saints**: it is impossible for the elect (the predestined) to fall away once they have been converted.

For information on Calvinism, go to Tulip.org which is a pro-Calvinism web site maintained by Christ Covenant Reformed, a particular church of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

What is the doctrine of total inability (i.e., total hereditary depravity, original sin)? Is it taught in the Bible?

While John Calvin studied to become a Catholic priest, he undoubtedly learned the Catholic doctrine of original sin. Roman Catholics believe that babies are "born with a fallen human nature and tainted by

original sin" (if. Catechism of the Catholic Church). John Calvin's doctrine of original sin and sprinkling babies is closely related to the Catholic Church's doctrine (if. Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 4, Chapters 15 and 16).

Calvin is known as the founder of the Reformed Churches (Presbyterian Church). He taught that each person's life perished, "having been extinguished by the sin of Adam" (Calvin's Commentary on 1 John 1:1), and that each person has a depraved nature (if. Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin). Therefore, Presbyterians believe that each person inherits original sin from Adam and is born lost in sin being hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin (if. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), The Book of Confessions).

The doctrine of total inability (i.e., total hereditary depravity, original sin) is not taught in the Bible. God tells us that we do not inherit anyone's sin (Ezek. 18:20; cf. 2 Ki. 14:6). We sin after being tempted when we are carried away and enticed by our own lusts (Ja. 1:13-15).

Jesus teaches us that we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3-4; Lk. 18:16-17) — we must be as infants regarding evil (1 Cor. 14:20). Babies are not born as sinners (as Calvinists would have us believe). If they die, they are safe, because they have no sin.

What is the doctrine of unconditional election (predestination)? Is it taught in the Bible?

Calvin's doctrine of unconditional election (predestination) contends that God has predestined some people to be saved and some people to be lost. This doctrine maintains that man does not have a free will.

Calvin taught that God did not elect (predestine) people by just looking into the future to see who would and would not obey. Calvin taught that God literally elected some people to be saved and allows everyone else to be lost. Commenting on Matt. 11:25-26, Calvin said, "This verse is impressive in two respects. The fact that not all receive the gospel is not due to the impotence of God, who could readily make all creatures submit to his empire. Secondly, that some arrive at faith, while others remain stupefied and obstinate, is due to his free election. He draws some to himself and passes others by; and in so doing, he himself distinguishes among men, whose situation by nature is the same" (Calvin Commentary VII: Election and Predestination).

Calvin harmonizes his doctrine of unconditional election (predestination) teaching that:

- everyone is born a sinner (total inability, original sin).
- God elects (predestines) those who will be saved (unconditional election).
- Christ, therefore, just died for the people who had been predestined to be saved (limited atonement).
- the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the people who have been predestined to salvation and

converts them (infallible grace). He does not work on those who are not predestined to salvation allowing them to be lost. • it is impossible for the elect (the predestined) to fall away once they are converted (perseverance of the saints, once saved always saved).

Calvin's doctrine of unconditional election (predestination) is not taught in the Bible. God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and does not wish for anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Ezek. 18:23). God has not predestined anyone to be lost or to perish.

Correspondingly, the Bible teaches that God has given us a free will to either obey or disobey Him. Christians can sin willfully (Heb. 10:26) and are commanded to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Christians are not predestined to salvation. They can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 12:15).

What is the doctrine of limited atonement? Is it taught in the Bible?

One of the doctrines of Calvinism is the doctrine of limited atonement. Five-point Calvinists believe that everyone is born in sin (original sin) and that God has predestined (unconditional election) some people to be saved and allows everyone else to be lost. Since God predestined only some people to be saved, they reason, Christ's blood only atoned (limited atonement) for the sins of the people who were predestined. The people who are not predestined to be saved have no way of being saved and are eternally lost from birth.

Calvinism's doctrine of limited atonement is not taught in the Bible. God has not predestined some people to be saved and some people to be lost. God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and all men to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The Bible says that Christ died:

- for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15).
- for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6).
- for us, while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8).
- for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).
- for sins, for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18).

Jesus died for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15). He is the author (source) of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9). Jesus invites everyone to come and be saved (Rev. 22:17). Jesus has not excluded anyone from obeying Him and being saved.

What is the doctrine of infallible grace (irresistible grace)? Is it taught in the Bible?

The doctrine of infallible grace (irresistible grace) asserts that the Holy Spirit operates directly upon people, who have been predestined, to convert them. Conversely, the Holy Spirit allegedly does not work upon the people who have not been predestined; therefore, God allows them to be lost. Resulting from this doctrine, some denominations require people to have an esoteric spiritual experience to be saved. And, some have developed a doctrine of "praying through" to be saved.

Calvin's doctrine of infallible grace (irresistible grace) is not taught in the Bible.

First, we must remember that God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Ezek. 18:23). God has not predestined some people to be saved allowing everyone else to be lost. So, Calvin's doctrine of infallible grace is based upon a false assumption.

Second, we must realize that God works through His word to convert people (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Th. 2:13). The Holy Spirit does not work in some mysterious way to just convert a predestined group of people, but He speaks through the word (Acts 1:16-18; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible teaches that we are born of the Spirit through God's word (Jn. 3:5-8; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). So, the Scriptures tell us that:

- the Spirit gives life and the word gives life (Jn. 6:63; Ps. 119:50, 93).
- God saves through the Spirit and the word (Tit. 3:5; Ja. 1:21; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22-23).
- we are washed, sanctified, justified by the Holy Spirit and we are sanctified, washed by the word (1 Cor. 6:11; Jn. 17:17; Eph. 5:26; cf. Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Lastly, we must realize that every example of conversion is ascribed to the word.

- They gladly received Peter's word and were baptized (Acts 2:40-41).
- Samaritans were baptized when they believed Philip's preaching (Acts 8:12-13).
- Philip preached from the Scriptures and the eunuch was baptized (Acts 8:35-39).
- Saul was told what to do and was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 9:6, 18; 22:16).
- Peter spoke the words by which Cornelius would be saved and he was baptized (Acts 10:22, 33-48; 11:14).
- Lydia heard the things spoken by Paul and was baptized (Acts 16:13-15).
- The jailer heard the word of the Lord and was baptized (Acts 16:31-34).
- The Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-2).
- Men in Ephesus were baptized after Paul taught them (Acts 19:1-7).

Not only is Calvin's doctrine of infallible grace (irresistible grace) a false doctrine, but it is a doctrine of hopelessness. It erroneously asserts that God only helps a predestined group of people. Fortunately, our God is a God of love and wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

What is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved)? Is it taught in the Bible?

Perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved) is Calvin's doctrine alleging that it is impossible for the elect (the predestined) to fall away once the Holy Spirit works to convert them. This doctrine is not taught in the Bible.

Perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved) maybe the most popular of Calvin's doctrines. Yet, the Scriptures clearly teach that once someone is saved, he can be lost.

- Christians can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 12:15).
- Christians can stray from the truth (Ja. 5:19).
- Some Christians will depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3; cf. Col. 2:16-23; 1 Tim. 6:21; Ja. 5:19-20).
- Christians can fall away from God (1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-8).
- The branches in Jesus that do not bear fruit are taken away, cast into the fire, and burned (Jn. 15:1-6). Because, they do not keep Jesus' commandments (Jn. 15:10).
- The apostle Paul knew that he could be lost after being saved (1 Cor. 9:27; Phil. 3:12-14).
- Some Christians had already turned aside after Satan (i.e., fell away) during the first century (1 Tim. 5:15; 6:21).
- False prophets and false teachers lead some Christians away from God by exploiting them with deceptive words (2 Pet. 2:1-22; 3:16; cf. Act 20:28-30).

Therefore, Christians are admonished to:

- obey and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).
- take heed lest they fall (1 Cor. 10:12).
- endure, not throwing away their confidence and shrinking back to destruction (Heb. 10:35-39).
- be nourished in the words of faith and in the sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6-10).
- take care that they are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin having an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God (Heb. 3:6-15).
- be diligent to enter heaven, lest they fall away (Heb. 4:11).
- be diligent to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).
- exercise their senses to discern good and evil by becoming skilled in the word of righteousness (Heb. 5:12-14).

An unfortunate result of the vast popularity of Calvin's doctrine (once saved, always saved) is that many people believe they can do anything and still be saved. If there ever was a lie, this is it (cf. Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 2:4, 21; Rev. 21:8).