**Calvinism**

Most of us are relatively unaware of what Calvinism is about and its implications for Christian theology, doctrine and practice. To get us started, let us consider what our theological and doctrinal presuppositions are.

Questions:

Is predestination biblical? If so, what passages would you use to support this. If not, what passages would you use to refute the idea of predestination?

Is God absolutely sovereign?

Is God’s will always done?

Are human beings born guilty of the sin of Adam (and Eve)?

Do you accept the idea of the “fall” of mankind in the sin of Adam as biblical? If so, what is the nature of that fall, and what are the implications for us as individuals?

Is the idea of free will biblical? If so, what verses would you use to support this belief?

Students: Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss your assumptions about these questions.

**Calvinism:**

Definition: The “reformed” theological system most commonly associated with the reformer John Calvin.

Better: The theological system based on the assumption of the absolute sovereignty of God and the concept of total depravity of mankind.

Note: Calvinism does not = the belief system of John Calvin as published in his book The Institutes of the Christian Religion (but it is fairly closely related to this theology)

Our outline:

I. The history of Calvinistic thinking.

II. Outline of Calvinist thinking and the implications on Christian theology, doctrine and practice.

III. Biblical teaching on free will, sovereignty, the fall, predestination and perseverance.

IV. Refuting Calvinism and Calvinist proof-texts.

First: Let us lay out the bottom line of this entire subject. It is the belief in Total Depravity. The entire system of Calvinism is based on the presupposition of total depravity, with all of its implications (original sin, faith only salvation, once-saved-always-saved).

Total Depravity (as defined for Reformed theology/Calvinism)

When Adam (and Eve) rebelled and sinned, the result was the “fall” of mankind, which means that we became completely depraved. We are completely incapable of loving or obeying God. We genetically inherit the sin of Adam and are born in sin. As a result, we are powerless, not only to stop sinning but to decide to respond to God’s love, to obey him, to repent and put our faith in him.

We are sinners in the hands of an angry God

In Adam’s fall we sinned all.

Where did this idea come from?

The simple answer: Augustine!

**I. History of Predestination, Original Sin and Total Depravity.**

[Cyprian (AD 200-258)(also of Carthage) also taught an incipient form of predestination and original sin in the mid third century]

1. Augustine of Hippo (354-430). The most influential theologian in Western Christianity throughout the Medieval period and during the Reformation. A “Doctor” of the Roman Church and the chief source of Catholic theology, certainly before Thomas Aquinas and largely still after Aquinas.

Wrote “The City of God.” God is so sovereign that we can have no part whatever to play in our own salvation. Therefore, we are only saved because God chooses us. (as opposed to **Pelagius**, who acknowledged that a human response leads to our salvation)

A former Manichean—a dualistic religion with a very dim view of human nature and which views physical things as essentially evil.

Wrote “Confessions” which reflects this pessimism and negative view of physical pleasure.

The Church in the 300’s AD baptizing babies

Why? Augustine: original sin. Pelagius: That’s not just!

Why? Sovereignty of God.

Result: Salvation has absolutely nothing to do with our response. It has everything to do with God’s sovereign choice. We are only saved because God chooses us.

The technical term for this is monergism.

On original sin:

“Tiny babies are not weighed down by their own sin, but they are being burdened with the sin of another.”

On free will:

Man’s free will avails him nothing, save to do evil.

On predestination:

Men’s evil wills are prepared by God and predestination. God, in his

timeless wisdom had decided to prepare only the will of a few.

"It is, therefore, in the power of the wicked to sin; but that in sinning they should do this or that by that wickedness is not in their power, but in God's, who divides the darkness and regulates it; so that hence even what they do contrary to God's will is not fulfilled except it be God's will."

In his Treatise on Grace & Free Will, the title of Chapter 41 reads, "The wills of men are so much in the power of God, that he can turn them whithersoever it pleases him."[9] And again, chapter 42 reads, "God does whatsoever he wills in the hearts of even wicked men."

Augustine’s opponent was Pelagius (c. 360- c.418)

Pelagius, apparently, taught that living without sin was, in principle, possible. He argued that man ought to strive toward sinlessness. His enemies accused him of denying the need for God’s grace for righteousness, but it is doubtful that this is what Pelagius actually believed. He certainly denied Total Depravity and Original Sin, but it is debatable that he denied the idea of a Fall.

Pelagius: Since perfection is possible for man, it is obligatory.

We did not sin in Adam. Rather we sinned like Adam. Used Deut 24:16 Ezekiel 18 to support this.

He fled Rome but was accepted in the East.

There is evidence that Augustine created a straw-man of Pelagius and that Pelagius was merely proposing synergism.

“Indeed, Pelagianism as we know it, that consistent body of ideas of momentous consequences, had come into existence, but in the mind of Augustine, not Pelagius.”

Augustine, in opposing Pelagius, declared that:

1. Death came from sin, not man's physical nature.

2. Infants must be baptized to be cleansed from original sin.

3. No good works can come without God's grace.

4. Children dying without baptism are excluded from both the Kingdom of heaven and eternal life.

Pelagius fled to the East where he was accepted with open arms by the Eastern Church.

Augustine appears to have hardened his position as a response to Pelagius. This is an important warning for us from Church History.

**Julian of Eclanum (c. 386-c. 455) took up the mantle of Pelagius in the West.**

(about Augustine) “You think that your Lord is capable of committing a crime

against justice such as is hardly conceivable even among the barbarians.”

Julian: “We maintain that men are the work of God, and that no one is forced unwillingly by His power either into evil or good, but that man does either good or ill of his own will; but that in a good work he is always assisted by God’s grace, while in evil he is incited by the suggestions of the devil.”

The ascetics of their day supported Julian and Pelagius because Augustine seemed to undermine the reason for living such a committed, sacrificial life.

Middle Ages

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) moved away from strict predestination. He was cautious because Pelagianism had already been declared heretical, but he moved away from Augustine.

“God, therefore, is the first cause, who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their actions from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary; but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them, for He operates in each thing according to his own nature.”

In other words, Aquinas believed in free will and not a strict monergism.

Theologians do classify him as a monergist, but his theology supports a real free will and a kind of synergism. Because of Aquinas, Catholicism has moved toward synergism.

Modern Catholicism theology is the theology of Aquinas.

**Martin Luther (1483-1546)** an Augustinian monk. Restored the theology of Augustine. To understand Luther, read Augustine.

Augustine had a very sensitive conscience and was subject to extremes of depression. His feelings on Original Sin were influenced by this.

He “discovered” salvation by faith (alone) in Romans.

A strong believer in Original Sin, Total Depravity, and Predestination and especially in the sovereignty of God.

He believed in baptismal regeneration, but also infant baptism, which was consistent with Original Sin/Total Depravity.

Skeptical of the canonicity of Hebrews because of his belief in perseverance of the Saints.

On James: “Therefore St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw,﻿ ﻿ compared to these others [Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians], for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.”

Note: Luther later removed this comment from his Bible preface.

On free will: (from *Bondage of the Will*)

“Free will is an empty term whose reality is lost and a lost liberty is not liberty at all”

Also: “Free will is really a fiction… everything takes place by absolute necessity.” Luther, *Assertio*, 36

This is Augustine!

On predestination of the damned:

Luther wrote on this in his *Bondage of the Will*

Regarding God's desire for all men to be saved, Luther himself objects. In response to the claim that 'God desires all men to be saved,' and that 'Christ died for all men,' he writes that:

"These points and others like them can be refuted as easily as the first one. For these verses must always be understood as pertaining to the elect only, as the apostle says in 2 Tim. 2:10 'everything for the sake of the elect.' For in an absolute sense Christ did not die for all, because he says: 'This is my blood which is poured out for you' and 'for many' - He does not say: for all - 'for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 14:24, Matt. 26:28)"[57]

"All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned." - Martin Luther

note: Luther is more enigmatic on double predestination that Zwingli or Calvin. Also, the later Lutheran *Concord* under the influence of Melanchthon, commits to single predestination. Luther uses language similar to double predestinarians, but he prefers to leave the nature of this as a mystery.

More important for predestination in America:

3. Ulrich Zwingli Zurich (1484-1531) was also a predestinationist, as were most of the reformation theologians. Clearly taught double predestination.

“Those individuals who end up damned forever in hell are also eternally determined by God for that fate.”

Zwingli had a strong influence on Calvin and was perhaps more Calvinist than Calvin.

4. John Calvin Geneva (1509-1564) *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Solidified the modern doctrine of predestination. Very strong on the sovereignty of God. God’s sovereignty trumps our ability to choose faith. We can have absolutely no part in our salvation. Period.

From the Institutes (1538 edn.):

We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death.”

Predestination to life is called “election,” while predestination to hell is called “reprobation.”

Calvin himself writes, “We assert that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined both whom he would admit to salvation and whom he would condemn to destruction” (Institutes 3.21.7).

Calvin’s arguments follow Augustine almost exactly. He uses Ephesians 1:4 and John 17:6 and 6:37, along with passages such as Romans 9 which describe God as hardening people’s hearts.

Stated that infants can have a kind of faith sufficient for salvation.

Really struggled to explain infant baptism, given salvation by faith alone.

Zwingli and Calvin both deny baptismal regeneration.

[Wikipedia: Baptismal regeneration is the name given to doctrines held by major Christian denominations which maintain that salvation is intimately linked to the act of baptism,]

On total depravity, Calvin said (Institutes 1.15.4) “Even though we grant that God’s image was not totally annihilatedand destroyed in him [Adam], yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.”

He also said;

“What remains in men? They are only vermin and rottenness”

Yet, God says the nearly identical thing about Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:27 and about mankind after the “Fall” in Genesis 9:6 “For in the image of God has God made man.”

Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was a disciple and biographer of Calvin, Calvin’s successor in Geneva and a hyper-Calvinist. He went beyond Calvin to supralapsarianism—that the fall of man was part of God’s will.

Reformed theology comes from Zwingli and Calvin through Beza. (Presbyterianism, Dutch Reformed, Baptists, Puritans)

[aside on Beza. He used Codex Bezae in his Greek New Testament (1582), making his Greek text superior to that of Erasmus. He donated the codex to Cambridge University and it is named after him]

TULIP

Total depravity

Unconditional election

Limited atonement (double predestination)

Irresistable grace

Perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved).

One thing about TULIP is that it is very logical and consistent. This is why it is so attractive to the mind. It is also why it is so vulnerable. If any of the five is proved wrong, the entire edifice comes falling down. (Smith uses 9/11 as a great illustration)

If perseverance is not true, then irresistible grace is not true. If limited atonement is not true, then unconditional election is also not true. The problem for moderns Calvinists, is that they want U and P to be true, but they are uncomfortable with L. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. We need to challenge people on this. People MUST be confronted with the fact that P is nonsensical without L. People say they are a two-point (T,P), three-point (TUP) or a four-point (TU \_IP Calvinist. They are very vulnerable on this.

This whole system is entirely logical if we accept Original Sin and Total Depravity.

Supralapsarianism.

Supralapsarianism (also antelapsarianism) is the view that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically preceded the decree of the fall while infralapsarianism (also called postlapsarianism and sublapsarianism) asserts that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically succeeded the Fall. In other words, God allowed the Fall, but from there decreed election.

These guys were more Calvinist than Calvin.

His student Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) rejected this teaching. This debate played out in Holland (making the word TULIP ironic!). The concretization of TULIP occurred as a counterbalance to Arminius’ teaching on free will.

Jacobus Arminius. Dutch. He studied under Beza, a strict supralapsarian. He moved through infralapsarianism to rejecting Calvinism/Unconditional election entirely—accepting synergism.

Synergism: The belief that God’s will and our will work together in salvation. Our decision is our own. It is not determined by God. God offers salvation, but we must receive it.

Q: Are you Arminian? (not Armenian)

[aside: The Jesuits, founded in the 16th century by Ignaitius Loyola, were/are Catholic synergists.]

Jacob Arminius and Arminianism. Father of the Remonstrants. He created the phrase “prevenient grace”.

This is the idea that God’s grace is available to all (not just the elect) and that it is available to all who choose to believe.

Arminius stated that "the grace sufficient for salvation is conferred on the Elect, and on the Non-elect; that, if they will, they may believe or not believe, may be saved or not be saved."

A summary: (from Wikipedia article on synergism)

Arminians: A human being cannot, on his or her own, turn to God. God grants all sinners prevenient grace (prevenient meaning "coming before"). With this prevenient grace (or with its effects on the fallen human), a person is able to freely choose to place faith in Christ or reject his salvation. If the person accepts it, then God justifies him and continues to give further grace to spiritually heal and sanctify him.

Note: LeGard Smith disagrees with Arminianism on this point, as he believes this allows for some sort of effect of “original sin” and partial depravity, both of which he denies.

Skip: [In response to Hendryx's (a strict Calvinist/monergist) question about the two individuals receiving prevenient grace and only one being saved, the Arminian would reply that the one who was saved freely chose faith, but only had the power to choose faith because of the prevenient grace, whereas the one who was not saved had the same assistance from prevenient grace and thus the same ability to choose, but freely chose not to have faith. Whether this is characterized as synergy will depend upon one's definition. It differs, however, from semi-Pelagianism, which maintains that a human being can begin to have faith without the need for grace]

Calvinism in the 1700s

US: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and the Puritans mid 1700’s very dark, depressing.

“In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”

“A sinner in the hands of an angry God.”

Attendance at US churches fell to a very low level, especially on the frontier.

No assurance of salvation. Congregants had to present evidence of a conversion event.

**FATALISM** Church attendance very low.

The Wesleys rejected Calvinism and taught a real free will. They are Arminian.

John Wesley on free will: "The will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet... every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace." "Natural free-will in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that comes into the world.'”

LaGard Smith on Arminius, Wesley:

1. Arminius teaches loss of original righteousness (due to loss of the holy Spirit or of the intimate influence of God in our lives) which leads to sin.

2. Wesley: Basically accepted total depravity “Man is depraved, corrupt and diseased.” But rejected original sin. [Note: original sin and total depravity are intimately connected in Calvinism, but they are not the same thing.]

3. Smith. No essential change in our nature at all when Adam sinned.

Barton Stone rejects predestination. Along with Alexander Campbell, they began the Restoration Movement.

Huge pendulum swing. Total assurance of salvation. Tulip light.

Happy Calvinism

Modern idea of “once saved always saved” results.

Once you have been saved (pray Jesus into your heart), no matter what happens after that time, you definitely will make it to heaven.

This could be called “cheap grace.”

Anathema to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc. who believed in baptismal regeneration and Christendom.

By the late 1800s we have the Mourner’s Bench and something like the Sinner’s Prayer developing from this Happy Calvinism.

It is from this that modern Evangelicalism evolved.

Charles Finney (1792-1875) Created the Mourner’s bench in 1835

"The church has always felt it necessary to have something of this kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles, baptism answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ, were called out to be baptized. It held the place that the anxious seat does now as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians".

Billy Sunday 1862-1935

A well-known baseball player from Iowa. He mixed entertainment with ministry. People were saved by walking down the “sawdust trail” to the front, or praying, or even by shaking hands with Sunday. Such “crusades” were adapted across America.

Lesson: We need to beware of the allure of “success.”

1950s Billy Graham, Bill Bright. Crusades.

In the late 1950s Bill Bright came up with the popular Four Spiritual Laws.

1. God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

2. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.

4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

This method ends with the Sinner's Prayer.

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

**II. Implications of Calvinism**

**a. Rejection of baptism as necessary for salvation (especially since the 18th century)**

**b. Lack of motivation toward repentance and effort toward righteousness? (debatable)**

**c. Strange ideas about creation. True Calvinists maximize and overliteralize the implications of the sin of Adam. No death before the fall of Adam and Eve. No carnivores. Strong commitment to young earth creationism.**

**d. Once saved, always saved.**

**e. A lack of intrinsic motivation for personal evangelism.**

**f. (for some) arrogance toward the lost. Calvinism was a principle justification for racism and slavery.**

**g. Intellectualism. (this may either be a cause or an effect)**

**h. Ironically, a lack of assurance of salvation. If I go back to a life of sin, then I was never saved?**

**III. The Bible on Free Will, Predestination, the Fall of Man and Perseverance of the Saints.**

We have to face the question biblically, if we are not born guilty of Original Sin and completely incapable of responding to God and doing good, then what DID happen at the Fall? Was there a fall at all?

First: Let us have a group discussion:

Q: Scriptures which appear to support the doctrine of predestination?

Q: Is a believer in this false doctrine lost?

Q: Scriptures which prove free will and refute predestination?

Our main study is going to be in Romans 5 and 8-9, but some preliminary thoughts:

Q: Where should we go first to learn about what happened in the Fall?

Let’s look at Genesis 3:1-13

The consequences. v. 21-24

1. They lost their innocence. God clothed them (v. 21). They now knew they were naked (v. 7)

2. “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. They gained a propensity toward sin—a “sinful nature”? This occurred, presumably, because they had gained knowledge of good and evil by eating of the tree. Before: just one temptation (to eat the fruit and thus to become like God). After: many temptations.

[aside: it is debatable that the phrase “sinful nature” is in the Bible. The Greek word *sarx* is best translated as flesh. According to the flesh. The phrase sinful nature is a biased interpretation which is influenced by Calvinism.]

3. They lost access to the tree of life. Did this cause them to lose physical immortality? We will talk about that when we study Romans.

These verses leave a fair amount of room for interpretation. However, we can be sure what they do NOT mean. They were not totally depraved, as we will show. They did NOT lose their free will in the Fall. Deut 30:19-20

Joshua 24:15 Ezekiel 18:19-20

Two more preliminaries:

1. Q: Is God’s will always done? No. See the Lord’s prayer Matthew 6:10. Your will be done…. Also Matthew 23:37 ..but you were not willing. Also Ezek 18:31-32 I take no pleasure in the death

Does someone not doing God’s will prove he is not sovereign? No, because he has sovereignly decreed free will. This is part of our being made in God’s image.

Calvinists allow God’s sovereignty to “trump” all of his other traits, including his love.

2. Is Faith alone biblical?

James 2:14-26

Galatians 5:6 Faith expressing itself in love

John 6:29 The works God requires? To believe in him.

3. Is baptism a work of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Baptism is passive. It is done to us. If baptism is a “work” it is a work of God. Colossians 2:12 It is God who is working in baptism. Not us.

A. Predestination in Romans

Romans 5:12-19 One of the most difficult passages in the entire Bible.

Adam and Jesus. They are very similar and they are very different.

Romans 5:12, 17, 18. Here is a central question. What did the sin of Adam do?

Are the doctrines of “Original Sin” and “Total Depravity” supported by these verses? Zwingli: “In Adams, fall, we sinned, all.”

These passages say this about the result of Adam’s sin:

a. Sin entered the world.

b. Death came to all (but which kind of death? Physical or spiritual or both?)

c. All sinned.

Note: All sinned. Death came to all because all sinned, not because Adam sinned.

Not all are responsible for Adam’s sin, but, because of what Adam did, all of us will sin. We are at least in some sense “fallen.” We have a propensity to sin that came into the world because of Adam’s sin.

5:13 “sin is not taken into account when there is no law” This “taken into account” is a relative thing. Explanation: Rom 5:20, Rom 7:13 …so that sin might increase… …. So that sin might become utterly sinful.

Q: Do you understand that sin is utterly sinful?

In other words, when the law came, our understanding of, and therefore our responsibility for sin became greater because it was more completely recognized for what it is.

5:14 Nevertheless (ie. despite this) death reigned, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command (because there were no written commands from God before Moses). In other words, people were lost before Moses.

Q: Would Adam and Eve have been immortal if they had not sinned?

Q: Did they become spiritually “dead” when they sinned?

Q: Do we inherit the inevitability of death from Adam or do we inherit the inevitable propensity toward sin or both?

These are debatable, but what is not debatable is that we did NOT become responsible for the sin of Adam and, therefore, guilty before we even sinned (Original Sin and Total Depravity). This would clearly violate Ezekiel 18:4 and many other passages, as well as a common sense understanding of God’s justice.

5:15 A key point. But the gift is not (exactly) like the trespass. (1 Cor 15:45-49)

The next section is an analogy which is not perfectly analogous. The gift and the trespass are largely analogous.

v. 16-17 The gift is not like the trespass.

The gift: Jesus

The trespass: Adam They are similar but different.

One act led to many sins

Those many sins led to the other act.

The gift followed many sins, while the condemnation followed one sin.

v. 18-19 In this sense, they are similar: The result of one sin was condemnation for all and the result of one act (Jesus’ voluntary death on the cross) was life for all men.

The second Adam in 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 Unlike Romans 5:12-18, this is talking about the physical effect of Adam and Jesus. “Dead” and “alive” here are physical. We all, like Adam, are subject to physical death. Adam is the first dead of the dead. Jesus is first born from the dead. He is the first of those raised from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 is a very difficult passage, but it is talking about the same thing. Context: He is talking about physical resurrection in new bodies. He is not talking about regeneration/salvation/saved from the second death.

**Now, let’s go to Romans 8:29-Romans 9**

Romans 8:29 Does foreknowledge imply predestination? (in human logical terms, it seems to, but not to God. To a human, if God knows who will be saved and who will be lost, this is equivalent to him choosing this result)

To paraphrase: Those who God, in his foreknowledge, knew would be saved through the blood of Jesus, he predestined the possibility of that salvation (as will be discussed in Ch 9)

Calvinism: TULIP.

Total depravity

Unconditional election

Limited atonement

Irresistable grace

Perseverence of the saints.

Is this what Paul is talking about in Romans 8:30? At first glance, the answer seems to be yes. But we know from many other passages that this is not true. (For example 1 Tim 2:4, Deut 30:19-20, 2 Cor 5:15 Zech 1:3 Return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you.

Joshua 24:15 Choose this day who you will serve…. and hundreds of other passages that imply we have free will and God desires all to be saved and that Jesus died for all not just for a few)

A basic rule of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics): First of all ask what the passage cannot possibly mean.

v. 30 (in a sense, because of Jesus’ death) all are predestined, but not all of those predestined are called (because not all hear), and not all of those who are called are justified (saved), and not all of those who are justified are glorified (make it to heaven).

But…. For those God foreknows, all of these are true of all of them, and that is what Paul is talking about.

Who is predestined, called, justified and glorified?

Calvinism: A tiny minority of all people. All others were created in order to go to hell.

Paul (in my opinion): those he foreknew (v. 29)

Romans 8:31-39 Is this good support for doctrine of “perseverance of the Saints”, more commonly known as “once saved, always saved.”

Answer, it could be, but that is REALLY stretching this passage and besides, if that is true, then we will need to throw Hebrews out of the Bible.

(parallel passage: John 10:27-29 “no one can snatch them out of my hand” True, but we can leave him.)

It is true that “nothing can separate us from the love of Christ” with the obvious exception being that we can separate our selves.

We can and should feel totally confident in Christ. Do you feel this way?

Romans CH 9-11 God rejects Israel and chooses the spiritual children of Abraham.

Romans 9:1-5 Paul is getting really emotional here. Why? Because he wants all of Israel to be saved. v. 3 I would be willing to go to hell if the Jews could be saved.

Paul continues the thought begun in Romans 3:1-2 about the advantage and the glory of the Jews. v. 4 Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises, as well as the patriarchs and the physical ancestry of Jesus Christ!

Why is Paul getting so emotional? He is about to explain to the Jews why God, in his predestination, has rejected them and chosen the Gentiles. This is a message they are not particularly ready to hear!

But…. If Jews do not combine this legacy with faith, then they will not be saved by this legacy.

v. 7 “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, the children of faith and of promise will be reconciled. (v. 8) He is using the context of the passage in Genesis 15:6 “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Background context: We should remember that this is a diatribe in which his opponents are Jews who are really upset that salvation is given so freely to the Gentiles to the point that they do not even need to obey the Law of Moses, whereas many Jews are not being saved.

Romans 9:6-9 “Not all Israel are Israel.” (v. 6) It is the children of promise who are saved, not the physical descendants of Abraham. (v. 8) Galatians 4:21-31.

Q: What should we rely on? The promise. What promise? That Abraham would have children like the grains of sand and the stars of the sky. In other words, in the promise of salvation/righteousness by faith.

Romans 9:10-18 God’s predestination.

What is God’s predestination like? God’s predestination is not about punishing. It is about blessing.

It is always about his plan to bring salvation through the faith of Abraham.

9:12-14 “The older will serve the younger” (Genesis 25:19-26) “Jacob I loved, Esau I hated” (Malachi 1:2-3) “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” (Exodus 33:19) Paul seems to border on harsh here. Why? In the context, because the Jews are complaining to God because he wants to save the Gentiles. This is something God will not tolerate.

Note: In all three Genesis 25:19-26, Malachi 1:2-3 and Exodus 33:19 are about God choosing Israel over others. They did not complain about that!!!!

Genesis 25:19-26 “The older will serve the younger” is a prefigure of the Jews serving the Gentiles.

Malachi 1:2-3 Did God hate Esau? No! He chose Jacob. He blessed Esau too, by the way!!!!!

This “election” of Jacob was in fact the election of the people Israel, not of Jacob himself. The election of Israel was unconditional and somewhat arbitrary (see Deut 9:6).

Romans 9:16 Here is the point. These unseen Jewish opponents feel that the Jews deserve salvation. Paul tells them that it is a gift of mercy which come by promise to those who believe God “It does not depend on man’s desire or effort.” They do not deserve salvation!!!!

Q: Does it bother you that God “hated Esau” and “loved Jacob”?

Jeremiah 12:1 Jeremiah questions God’s justice.

Q: Are there things about God you, frankly, do not like?

Romans 9:17-29 More examples.

Did God predestine that Pharaoh go to hell? No! He predestined that he would do those things which led to the deliverance of Israel as a foreshadow of our salvation in Christ.

Both with Pharaoh and Judas, the purpose was to free his people from slavery.

But in neither case did God predestine their condemnation. Both could have repented.

v. 19 The diatribe opponent is saying: It this is so, then if we sin, it is God’s fault. Then I am not responsible when I sin. It is all God’s will.

My response: Good luck trying that ploy with God.

v. 20 “Who are you, O man, to talk back to God.” God appears to be pretty tough here. Why? Because the Jews are upset that the Gentiles are being saved.

v. 22-29 Paul quotes from several prophecies which demonstrate that 1. The Gentiles will be saved (Hoseah 2:23m Hosea 1:10) and 2. Only a remnant of the Jews will be saved. (Isaiah 10:22-23, Isaiah 1:9

Summary: Sure, God predestines what he will, but ALL of it is about his desire to save as many as possible. “first the Jews, but then the Gentiles.”

[another potter/clay predestination illustration is in Jeremiah 18:1-10. Here it should be noted that the ultimate fate of Israel was NOT predetermined despite their election. “If that nation repents of its evil, I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.: Vice versa is also true. What is true of individuals for eternity in Ezek 18 is also true of nations in the temporal sense.]

[other examples of God’s predestination: the choice of Moses and Aaron, of Abraham and especially of Isaac, as well as Jacob, David and even Solomon—also of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel and Jonah—all were chosen by God for “special duty” (quoting LaGard Smith)]

God: If I used the stubbornness and sinfulness of the Jews in order to help Gentiles to be saved, aren’t you happy that they are saved?

Romans 9:30-33 Paul summarizes his argument so far.

If the Jews are lost, it is because they did not join the law with faith. They were religious, but not faithful.

If the Gentiles are saved, despite not having the law, it is only by faith.

The righteous will live by faith. For those who seek salvation by works, Jesus is a stumbling block.

Q: How do you seek salvation? How do you seek righteousness?

**B. Hebrews and Falling Away. The doctrine of perseverance.**

First: Hebrews and “falling away”—losing our salvation/Calvinism.

The doctrine of falling away is presented in by far its clearest in the NT in Hebrews.

Scriptures in Hebrews which nail this teaching:

The entire book was written to prevent Christians from losing their salvation.

(other passages on falling away. Luke 8:11-15 Jesus’ interpretation of the Parable of the Sower. Note that the first man failed to believe and to be saved, while the second person did believe, but fell away.)

**Warnings against falling away.**

Hebrews 2:1-3 How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation.

Hebrews 3:7-11 They shall never enter my rest.

Hebrews 3:14 We… share in Christ IF we hold firmly till the end….

Hebrews 3:16-4:11 esp. 3:16-4:1

Foreshadow of the Jews in the wilderness.

Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall short of it…

Hebrews 6:4-8 Who is he talking to?

* a. been enlightened (NT church “enlightened” = baptized)
* b. tasted the heavenly gift (salvation?)
* c. shared in the Holy Spirit
* d. tasted the goodness of the word
* e. tasted the coming age (saved)

That Hebrews commentary: Two audiences; Christians and Jewish believers who have not yet chosen to be baptized. (circular reasoning)

What happens to these people?

* It is ***impossible***… if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.
* They are crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Land that produces thorns… will be burned.

Let us be careful how we use the term “fall away.”

Hebrews 10:26-31

* Crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Subjecting Jesus to public disgrace
* Trampling the Son of God under foot. (Heb 10:29)
* Insulted the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29)
* Blasphemed (spoken against) the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32)
* Committed the unforgivable sin (1 John 5:16, Luke 12:10)
* What is the “unforgivable sin?” To willfully, deliberately continue in sin. (Hebrews 10:26)

Hebrews 12:14-17

* See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and ***defile many.*** (ie. They were pure but
* become defiled)
* He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.
* Hebrews 12:25 If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth (Moses), how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven (Jesus).

The doctrine “once saved, always saved” is the “P” in TULIP.

Perseverence of the Saints.

This doctrine is the last leg in a long series of logical progression of thought which begins with “original sin.”

Other passages which unambiguously disprove “perseverance of the Saints”:

James 5:19-20 on perseverance Brothers, if one of you…. Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Phil 2:12 Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Romans 11:19-22 (to Gentile Christians) If God did not spare the natural branches…. But kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

Matthew 25:1-13 Parable of the Virgins

Matthew 24:13 …but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

1 Pet 4:17-18 If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Judgment begins with the family of God. If perseverance is correct, how does that work?

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body—whether good or bad.

Romans 2:5-6 …each according to what he has done.

John 15:6 If we do not *remain* in him (ie we were in him) we will be thrown into the fire and burned.

2 Tim 2:10-11 If we die with him, but also … if we endure with him…

God wants us to be confident and assured, as any father wants his child to be, but if we blithely assume we deserve what we have and “ignore so great a salvation” then we are in danger of losing it. 2 Peter 1:10-11 is a great example of this. We are told to “make our calling and election sure” but the context is an assurance, not a reason to always be in doubt.

Doctrine of Predestination:

Three kinds of doctrines:

Essential (salvation issue)

Important (not a salvation issue, but can have a significant effect on our relationship with God)

Not important (an actual biblical teaching or an implied teaching which one can be wrong about with little if any effect on our relationship with God)

Q: Where does predestination fall in this range?

Q: Where does once saved, always saved fall in this range?

What is the problem with this doctrine. Why is it, perhaps, in the first category?

Because, as Julian of Eclanum charged, it makes God the creator of evil.

It undermines the love of God, because love always gives a real choice.

**IV. Responding to Calvinism and Calvinist proof-texts.**

**Questions for Calvinists**

**Responding to Calvinist proof-texts.**

Calvinists teach salvation by grace (alone) and faith (alone). But if we take what they believe on face value, it is not really our faith which saves us. It is God’s election which saves us.

**Question #1 for a Calvinist**: What is the difference between election and salvation? If election has nothing to do with our faith, then what is the role of faith in our salvation?

If we accept the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 8:28-30, then when God foreknows and predestines us, then he, by necessity will call us and, by necessity, we will have to put our faith in him, whether we like it or not and will therefore be glorified and we will, whether we like it or not, remain faithful to him and be glorified.

Any choice we make to believe, to respond to a sermon, to read the Bible is the result of God’s election, not our choice. *We are the object of faith, not the subject of faith.*

Article XIV of the Canons of Dort (1619) “Faith is therefore to be considered as a gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed and infused into him; nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe and expects that man should, by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation; but because he… produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

In Calvinism we are not saved by faith but by election/predestination. The salvation by faith is a mere appearance.

If Calvinists believe that “Faith is a necessary condition for salvation, but not for election”

Then they admit that they believe election has nothing to do with faith.

A modern Calvinist, Boettner says: “A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believed in Christ because he is saved.” What about Acts 16:31, John 6:28-29, Romans 10:9-10

Calvinists:

If God were to grant us salvation based on our decision to accept his grace, then this would make grace meaningless. It would mean that we have the ability to save ourselves.

This is nonsense.

If you are in a burning house and people are below holding a blanket to catch you, are you “saved” by them asking you to jump?

Answer: No. Only when you jump are you saved from the fire.

Will the person thus saved claim to have saved him or herself? Nonsense!!!

The Calvinist’s response: If you are in sin, you are dead, and you are therefore incapable of jumping out of the window yourself. God must do it for you.

But this is circular reasoning. It presupposes that we are “dead” in order to prove we are dead. Can Calvinists prove total depravity from scripture?

Will anyone seriously propose that calling on the name of Christ in baptism is us saving ourselves? This charge is spurious.

Using the above example, if the person in the window were to find a blanket and throw it down to his saviors, perhaps he could claim to have had a role in saving himself. None of us claim to have saved ourselves by faith. It is by the cross of Jesus.

Next question: Would this man have been saved from the fire if he had not jumped?

Calvinist: But if we are saved when we are baptized or when we put our faith in him, then that we are earning our salvation.

Wrong. God is not obligated to save us because we put our faith in him or because we are baptized. This does not lessen his sovereignty because it is God who created the plan and it is God who commands us to accept this offer. How is this lessening God’s sovereignty?

Again, the ENTIRE argument is based on Total Depravity as a presupposition, not on any kind of reason or biblical argument.

Illustration:

(to someone in the audience) Here, let me give you a crisp $100 bill. (prepare ahead and tell him not to take it right away)

Has he received the $100? Why not?

(Now, have him take the bill)

Question:

Did he earn the money? Was it a free gift? Was my asking him to accept the gift asking him to pay for the money?

In fact, is there such a thing as a truly “free” gift, with no strings attached? Does not the recipient, at the very least, have to accept the gift? Is acceptance not an act of the recipient, and not of the giver?

Yet, Calvinists insist that receiving the gift is not an act of the recipient. It is a gift of the giver! This is nonsense.

Acts 2:36-39 The people: What must we do? Calvinists: Nothing! God already did it. You are already saved simply by asking the question.

Peter: Repent and be baptized. Like LeGard Smith says, the gift is free, but there are “strings” attached.

What is the alternative? The alternative is being forced to be saved, which, in essence, is what Calvinism is. God is pushing us into the water trough.

No orthodox Christian claims to be saved simply by trusting Him or by being baptized. We bring nothing to the cross.

The Calvinist: Yes you do. You bring your baptism.

The Christian: No I do not.

The Calvinist: Yes you do.

The Christian: No I do not.

Does the evangelical Christian have a right to tell you that you are viewing your faith as a work of salvation? Again, this is Circular Reasoning!!!!!

Q: Do some (many) believers try to earn their salvation through their works? Absolutely!!!! We need to teach against this notion. But what does this fact prove?

Calvinist’s illustration of a truly free gift:

It is like a nurse giving an IV to a comatose patient.

Again, this is *presupposing total depravity*, which has not been proved. The comatose patient is not a good analogy!!!

**Question #2 for a Calvinist**: Why do we exist? Why did God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden? What does the Bible say? Genesis 1-2.

Love gives a choice. Calvinism does two very bad things:

1. It makes us automatons. It removes from us the ability to truly love God.

2. It makes God the author of evil.

Genesis Ch 1-2 completely destroys the very foundation of Calvinism.

**Question #3 for a Calvinist:**

According to your belief, why are the lost not saved?

Because they sinned? No!!!

Because God does not want them to be saved.

But what about 1 Timothy 2:3-4 God desires all men to be saved. (Calvinists; God desires all the elect to be saved)

**Question #4 for a Calvinist:**

Why do we love God? Because he first loved us (1 John 4:19)?

No! Because he decided to make us love him

Love is risky. Ask any parent.

God took a great risk when he made us and let us decide if we would love him.

God took a great risk when he loved Israel. God was greatly pained when they rejected him Genesis 6:6

But in Calvinism, God took no risks. It was all decided before we were born.

**Question #5 for a Calvinist:**

Were Adam and Eve free to choose whether to eat of the tree or not?

If not, then whose “fault” was it that they sinned?

If yes, then were they literally the only people who ever had a choice in all history (except perhaps Jesus)

[Question for a Calvinist:

In Numbers 16:22 is the answer yes or not? (this is a rhetorical question in which Moses is assuming the answer is no)

The consistent Calvinist? Yes.]

**Question #6 for a Calvinist:**

What about little babies? What if they are not baptized? (assuming you teach infant baptism, which many Calvinists do not)

Typical trained Calvinist’s response: The elect babies are saved, the unelected babies are not.

This seems too harsh, so some of them do a bizarre speculation.

Those babies who are reprobate (ie predestined to hell) will not die until they are accountable. No condemned baby will ever die. So, if a baby dies, this proves that they were of the elect.

Westminister Confession “Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases.” Q: If children are all alike born depraved and sinful, how does this work? By their faith? Is there a scripture for this?

Talk about spiritual/doctrinal gymnastics!!!! [and leads to bizarre interpretations of 1 Cor 7:12-14 in which all the children of the elect are also elect which is proved wrong when they grow up to be reprobate]

Our answer: Only those who had a choice and who reject God’s choice and love are lost.

**Question for a Calvinist #7** If you believe in limited atonement, then how do you explain the following passages?

Other passages to use. 1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. Even Calvin, not a true Calvinist, agreed that this was literally true (sort of). He said that Christ’s suffering was sufficient for the whole world, but effectual for the elect alone.

Luke 2:10 Good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

2 Cor 5:14 For we are convinced that one died for all.

John 12:32 But when I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto myself.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men.

And then, of course, there is 1Tim 2:3-6 God desires all men to be saved….Christ gave himself as a ransom for all men.

Also Heb 2:9, Rev 22:17, 1 John 4:14, etc.

2 Pet 3:9 (already used?) …not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. Clearly, God’s will is not always done.

**Last question for a Calvinist:**

God is love (1 John 4:16) and God is just (2 Thess 1:6), and everything God has made is very good (Genesis 1:31). How, then, do you explain that God can be good, loving and just, yet predestine the vast majority of humans to be unrepentant sinners and to go to hell? How can God be the author and cause of evil?

Luther: “This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that He is merciful to the very One who saves so few and damns so many. To believe he is just, the One who according to His will, makes us necessarily damnable.”

Calvinist proof-texts:

Note that these are proof-texts for Total Depravity. There are two ways to defeat Calvinsm. Bottom up or top down. If total depravity is not true, then….. If perseverance of the saints is not true then…

1. Exodus 20:4 This is about the physical consequences in this world for sins committed. It is a moral law that sin produces consequences in the temporal world. When we sin we cause suffering. This is NOT about eternal consequences. For a discussion of eternal consequences, look at Ezekiel 18. We cannot use Ezekiel 18 to disprove Exodus 20:4 or vice versa. We must understand how both are true, and when we do the difficulty is resolved.

2. Psalm 51:5 This is poetry. David is speaking from a deep emotion. He is using hyperbole. We cannot use highly emotionally charged poetry as proof of a doctrine. Look at Psalm 51:4. This is obviously not literally true (in fact in the Law of Moses, the guilt offering was specifically for sins committed against another person)

Similarly Psalm 58:3 is emotional and hyperbole.

3. Romans 3:9-12 None are righteous. No one seeks God. All have become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

True, but this needs to be interpreted in light of

Matthew 13:17 Many prophets and righteous men longed to see…

Psalm 63:1 [David says] “O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you

2 Chron 34:3 He began to seek the God of his father David.

1 Kings 19:18 Yet I have 7000 who have not bowed their knee to Baal.

Clearly, Paul does not expect us to take this in its most literal possible sense.

What, then, does it mean? What about Romans 3:23. That is what it means. Or Ecclesiastes 7:20 “There is not a righteous man on the earth who does right and never sins.”

It means that all men sin and become unrighteous therefore and that none are sufficiently righteous to warrant eternal life. None seek God with the undivided mind and heart that God desires of us.

4. Two related proof-texts for total depravity. Arguably the best ammunition Calvinists have as proof-texts. Acts 13:48, 1 Pet 2:8. These are two sides of a coin—one about the saved and the other about the lost.

Are these passages about a general rather than a specific election? Debatable. Which means that these passages are debatable. We will “give” these two to the Calvinists, taken in isolation, but in the big picture, the correct interpretation is clear.

5. 1 Cor 2:14 The man without the Spirit…cannot understand the things of God. Does this prove total depravity outside of election? This statement is certainly true of the unsaved, but Paul is addressing Christians (1 Cor 1:2) and, to the extent that the Corinthians are behaving in an unspiritual way (which is certainly happening!), Paul is applying this truism to them as well. To the extent that these unspiritual disciples are behaving stubbornly in an unenlightened way, this statement is true of them.

To put it another way, as redeemed people, we are saved already, but not yet and we are spiritual already but not yet. This is the reality of existence for believers, whether we are Calvinists or not. This passage is not discussing anything like total depravity but relative depravity. To this extent, the passage applies both to the saved and to the unsaved.

Note: If we have “flesh” or if we have a “sinful nature,” What is this nature? Is it an inborn disease? No. It is a habit we acquire in this life of turning that which was innately good in us and perverting it.

Do we sin because we are born sinners (Calvinism) or are we sinners because we sin (Bible). For example, what about Adam and Eve? Are we fundamentally different from them? If so, how? James 1:13-15 explains how this works. It is not our inherited sinful nature making us do things. Otherwise we would always do evil. It is our evil desires, not Satan or God or an inborn sinful nature that leads us to be tempted and, finally, to sin. We do not have to do any particular sin, although we do sin. We are sinners because we sin. We always have a choice. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13 tells us this. In fact, by the time we become accountable for our sins, such giving in to temptation has already become ingrained. This is expressed in Titus 3:2-7. And even after we are saved by God’s mercy, these ingrained habits, this “sinful nature” still has its way with us at times. Is it all have sinned or is it all must sin? (Romans 3:23)

On total depravity, what about Acts 17:26-27 Why did God determine the times and places for each of us? So that he could assure the elect are saved and the reprobrate are lost? NO!!! ….so that we would seek him. Note this: **“he is not far from each one of us.”** Besides, in v. 30, he commands ALL people EVERYWHERE to repent.

(which, by the way, does not just disprove total depravity, but also that there are no conditions from God for our salvation.)

Summary:

Calvinism is a theological system which was invented by Augustine, not by John Calvin. It came not from scripture, but either from his inherent dualism/Manichaeism or as a means to explain infant baptism or both. In any case, although the system is logical—indeed perhaps more “logical” than the truth—it is based on circular reasoning and on patently false assumptions about God. It is based on the assumption that if God gives us the choice of whether to accept his free gift or not, then this makes null and void his sovereignty. It is to be strongly rejected on multiple grounds. First, because it makes God the author of evil. Second, because it makes both the “love” of God for us and of us for Him to not be genuine love. Third, because it gives a theological basis for the twin false doctrines of praying Jesus into our hearts for salvation and once-saved-always-saved. The salvation of many millions of souls is at stake here. We cannot let this false theology remain unchallenged and we must inoculate the believers in our churches against this pernicious theological system.