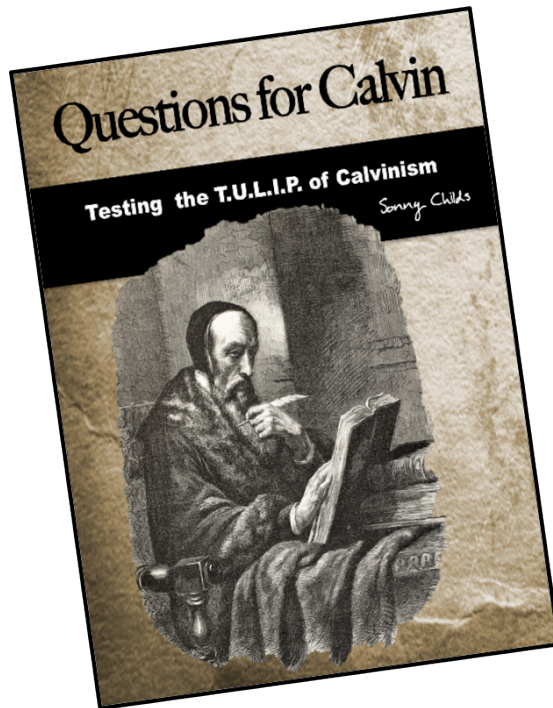


Questions for Calvin
Testing the T.U.L.I.P. of Calvinism

By Sonny Childs



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CAUTION

The questions and answers found within this book are very sensitive. Had we raised these questions during the time of John Calvin's theocratic reign over Geneva, Switzerland, we could have faced exile or even execution for opposing his doctrine.

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Part One

The Test

Introduction

Who Was Calvin?

His Life:

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, Picardy, France. He was originally trained as a Humanist Lawyer. He attended the University of Paris, the University of Orleans, the University of Bourges, and is described as a theologian as well as an ecclesiastical statesman. He wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible, but his most notable work is entitled "Institutes of Christian Religion" published in 1536.

Later in life, Calvin reigned, as both a religious and civil authority, over Geneva, Switzerland. He was cruel, dictatorial and torturous in his demand for doctrinal submission. He actively pursued the power of excommunication in order to punish those who disagreed with him. Within the first five years of his rule in Geneva, over 50 dissenters were executed and over 70 were exiled for their beliefs.

John Calvin died on May 27, 1564.

His Doctrine:

Calvin was a contemporary of Martin Luther, the "Father of the Reformation Movement." Although it seems Luther inspired Calvin's rebellion against the Catholic Church, the two men were fundamentally different in their theology. Luther began with a gracious God Who then went on to determine everything. Calvin started with a God Who determined everything then went on to limit His graciousness to only a few.

Calvin's view of predestination was especially troublesome for followers who longed to know that they were part of what Calvin considered to be the elect. Over time, Calvin addressed this uncertainty by suggesting that works do not lead to salvation, but rather are evidences of one's salvation. The harder one works, the more prosperous he becomes. The more prosperous he becomes, the more assurance he can have of his own election. (Example: When asked how they know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13), a Calvinist will almost certainly point to the high standard of his own morality or that of his church. He is his own proof of his own election.)

Though Calvin's view of predestination insists that God controls all, it also insists that man has the ability to prove his election by his own good works, a point that many would call a contradiction.

His T.U.L.I.P.:

T.U.L.I.P. is an acronym often used to summarize the five core doctrines of Calvin, Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. These five points were codified in the Canons of Dort by the Synod of Dort in 1618 and 1619 in order to address opposition raised by the Arminians of that day.

John Calvin was an unbalanced reactionary. Growing up under the heavy hand of Catholic legalism, Calvin reacted by embracing the opposite extreme - man's total inability to choose God. His overreaction and out of balance response to legalism can easily be seen in his many quotes as well as the extreme qualifiers his followers used to describe points within the T.U.L.I.P. Notice these examples: According to Calvinism, man is not just depraved, he is "totally" depraved. Election is not accepted; it is "unconditional." Grace is not an invitation it is "irresistible." Extreme qualifiers mark an extreme doctrine.

It is this tendency for unbalance that presents Calvinism's greatest flaw. By adopting Calvin's logic, a follower is forced to engage in selective obedience and ignore many of the Holy Spirit's words. Instead of seeking the harmony of Scripture, they lift one passage above another in order to substantiate Calvin's position. Instead of letting the Bible interpret itself, they let a man interpret the Bible for them. Instead of starting with the balance of God's Word, they start with the imbalance of Calvin.

Conclusion:

It is the purpose of this study to lay Calvin's T.U.L.I.P. beside the Holy Word of God and test it for doctrinal compatibility. Will the extreme teachings of Calvin harmonize with the Holy Scriptures? Will the Bible validate his influence on the world or will the Lord of balance expose him as a reactionary and label him as a false teacher?

The evidence waits. Let the test begin!

Calvin's T.U.L.I.P.

T is for Total Depravity ("Original Sin")

In the Words of Calvin:

John Calvin (Institutes 2.1.9, Calvin 1960:253)

"Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole man is overwhelmed – as by a deluge—from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin."

Calvin believed and taught that humans inherit the original sin of Adam. In other words, children inherit the sin from their father who inherited the sin from his father, and so on and so on, all the way back to Adam. On top of this flawed foundation, he built the flawed conclusion that humanity is totally corrupt and we are even without the ability to seek God's help.

In the Words of God:

Ezekiel 18:20-21 (NIV)

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die."

Q: If **Total Depravity** means that humanity inherits the original sin of Adam, why was Ezekiel inspired to write these words? Why would he say that the son does not "bear the guilt" of his father? Why would the Holy Spirit validate personal responsibility by saying, "...and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself"? Why would He even bring up a wicked man who "turns from all his sins" if we are so totally depraved that we are without even the ability to turn to God?

A: Please don't misunderstand. The apostle Paul certainly was correct when he said, "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." (Romans 5:12, NIV). But don't forget that last qualifying phrase, "because all sinned." It is one thing to be born into a realm governed by Adam's nature (innocence removed), it is quite another to suggest that we inherit his sin. We share in the guilt of Adam only because we perpetuate his sinful choice through our own sinful choices. Read again the words of Ezekiel 18:20-21. We are responsible for sin because of choice, not because of inheritance.

Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Acts 17:26-27 (NIV)

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”

Q: If **Total Depravity** means that humanity is without even the freewill to choose God, then why was Paul inspired to write these words? Why would he say that God wants man to “seek him”? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire the word “perhaps” if choosing God is not an option? Why does Paul say that God wants us to “reach out for him”?

A: Please don’t misunderstand, the prophet certainly was correct when he said, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6, NIV). Yet equally true are the words of the Apostle Paul, “reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:27, NIV). Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

John 7:17 (NIV)

“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

Q: If **Total Depravity** means that humanity is without even the freewill to choose God, why did Jesus say these words? Why would He suggest that there is an option for us to choose “to do the will of God” if, in fact, we are so totally depraved that we haven’t even the ability to do what He says we can do? Why would He suggest that discovering whether or not His “teaching comes from God” is contingent upon our choosing “to do the will of God”?

A: Please don’t misunderstand, the apostle Paul certainly was correct when he said, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12, NIV). In like manner, David also wrote in Psalms 51:5, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (NIV) But are these passages intended to prompt a literal interpretation or are they rhetorical overstatement? Did Paul intend to indict all of humanity? Is there is no possibility that anyone ever did seek God or ever would seek Him? Certainly Noah sought after God and, as a result, was

spared the results of the Flood. Abraham sought God and obtained at least enough understanding to enter into a covenant with God. In 2 Chronicles 17:4, the Holy Spirit says that Jehoshaphat sought after God and later He even dated the year Josiah “began to seek the God of his father David.” (2 Chronicles 34:3, NIV). Don’t forget the words of Jesus in John 7:17 (above). And what about Psalms 51:5? Did David intend for us to conclude that babies are conceived in sin and therefore born sinful infants? Or, is it possible that he was using rhetorical overstatement to expose the impact of sin on the entire human sphere and emphasize our lack of excuse? It is one thing to be born into a realm governed by Adam's nature (innocence removed), it is quite another to suggest that babies inherit Adam's guilty sentence. Compare Psalms 51:5 (above) with Luke 18:16-17 (below)? Only by submitting to the harmony of all these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Additional Passages for Further Study:

Luke 18:16-17 (NIV)

"Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'"

Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NIV)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

Application:

There can be little unity among Christians as long as human doctrines dominate and selective obedience governs hermeneutics (principles for interpreting Scripture). Only by submitting to the whole counsel of God can we correctly handle the word of truth. We must raise our sights higher than the teachings of men.

2 Timothy 2:15, NIV

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Calvin's T.U.L.I.P.

U is for Unconditional Election ("Predestination")

In the Words of Calvin:

John Calvin (Institutes 3.21.7, Calvin 1960:931; see also Institutes 3.22.1, Calvin 1960:932)

"We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred to door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation."

Calvin believed and taught that God preempted human will and determined, before creation, who would be elected for salvation and who would be damned.

In the Words of God:

Matthew 24:22-24 (NIV)

"If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Q: If **Unconditional Election** means that the elected are also unconditionally saved, then what did Jesus mean when He spoke the prophetic words above? Why would He say that it is "possible" for false teachers "to deceive" even "the elect"? Why give the warning, "do not believe it," if election is unconditional? Why admonish them to remain alert to the dangers of "false messiahs and false prophets" if their election had no conditions?

A: Please don't misunderstand, just seven verses after our passage above, Jesus does say that He "will gather his elect from the four winds." Truly, all the elect of that gathering will be saved. But the previous words of our Lord are equally true. It is "possible" that some of the elect will succumb to deception and will be sifted out because they believed in "false messiahs." Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

2 Peter 1:5-10 (NIV)

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election.”

Q: If **Unconditional Election** is truly unconditional, why did the Holy Spirit place so many conditions on our election? Why “make every effort” (said twice) if our election is without conditions? Why “add to your faith,” if our election is unconditional? Why use a term like “self-control” if self has no influence over control and we are not intended to employ self-control as a condition of confirming to our election? Why “confirm your calling and election” if election has no conditions?

A: Please don’t misunderstand, just two verses earlier Peter does say, “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” Truly, it is only by the help of God that we can be truly godly. But equally true are the words that follow. To accept His godliness we must “make every effort,” add to our faith, practice “self-control” and “confirm” our election. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Romans 9:10-13 (NIV)

"Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Q: Does election infer salvation or does election simply infer selection for special favor and advantages? Was Esau spiritually lost "in order that God’s purpose in election might stand" or was he simply advantaged less in life, loved less? Is it possible that Esau was "hated" by God in the same sense that we are told to "hate" our father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters? See Luke 14:26.

A: Please don’t misunderstand, both election and salvation come totally as a result of God's grace. However, God's election (the advantages He gives to some, Romans 9:18) and His salvation (the potential He

gives to all, 2 Peter 3:9) are not always given according to the same criteria. Election is assigned in the same manner that a potter gives purpose to his clay. (See Romans 9:19-21.) Salvation is assigned according to belief. (See the same context, Romans 9:30-32; 10:4.) Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Additional Passages for Further Study:

Romans 8:12-13 (NIV)

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

Acts 2:40-41 (NIV)

"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV)

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Philippians 1:27 (NIV)

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

James 1:10 (NIV)

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."

Application:

There can be little unity among Christians as long as human doctrines dominate and selective obedience governs hermeneutics (principles for interpreting Scripture). Only by submitting to the whole counsel of God can we correctly handle the word of truth. We must raise our sights higher than the teachings of men.

2 Timothy 2:15, NIV

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

Calvin's T.U.L.I.P.

L is for Limited Atonement ("Particular Redemption")

In the Words of Calvin:

John Calvin (Institutes 2.5.3; Calvin 1960:320)

"Therefore, though all of us are by nature suffering from the same disease, only those whom it pleases the Lord to touch with his healing hand will get well. The others, whom he, in his righteous judgment, passes over, waste away in their own rottenness until they are consumed. There is no other reason why some persevere to the end, while others fall at the beginning of the course."

Calvin believed and taught that Jesus only died for a limited few. This doctrine is the natural offspring of the assumption made in the previous letter of the T.U.L.I.P., "Unconditional Election." If election and salvation mean the same thing, and God preselected the saved without their freewill, then it only stands to reason that He also predetermined to limit the redemptive power of Jesus. Why waste it on those who have no hope of salvation? In other words, because not everyone had the potential of being saved, God preordained that His Son's blood would only be effective for those He had preselected for salvation.

In the Words of God:

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Q: If **Limited Atonement** means that Jesus only died for a select few, why did Jesus give such a beautiful declaration of God's universal love? Why mention the entire world three times if He really meant only a few within the world? Why use such a general term as "whoever" if He really meant "not everyone"? Why did Jesus qualify the most quoted verse in all the Bible with the words of verse 17, the explicit declaration, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world"?

A: Please don't misunderstand, Jesus also said, "...small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:14, NIV) But just because only "a few find it" that does not mean the road or the gate are unavailable to the rest. It simply means that only a few seek it and only a few make the freewill choice to accept their entrance within. Truly, the atonement of Jesus is limited, but not because God forces some to go to Hell. It is limited because the masses refuse to accept the Lord's atonement. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

2 Peter 3:8-9 (NIV)

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Q: If **Limited Atonement** means that Jesus only died for a select few, why present such a loving revelation of God being so patient that He doesn't want "anyone to perish"? Why say "anyone" if His Son's blood doesn't have the potential to cover all? Why use the word "everyone" if He really only meant a few? (Note: Some would argue that this verse is only addressing those who are already saved. Even if that is true, and given the context, I don't believe it is, this passage clearly indicates that even the saved have the potential of losing their faith and perishing, completely contradicting the last letter in Calvin's T.U.L.I.P., "Perseverance of the Saints" or "Once Saved, Always Saved.")

A: Please don't misunderstand, Peter does go on to warn his readers, "...make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation...." (2 Peter 3:14-15, NIV) Truly, the atonement of Jesus is limited, but it is limited only because some choose not to "make every effort." Notice also the last phrase of this passage, "...our Lord's patience means salvation...." Salvation for whom? God is patient because He wants to give all of humanity sufficient opportunity to avail themselves of the unlimited atonement of His Son. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."

Mark 16:15-16 (NIV)

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"

Colossians 1:23 (NIV)

"This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

Q: If **Limited Atonement** means that Jesus only died for a select few, why place such a heavy emphasis on "the whole world," "all nations," "all the world," "all creation" and "every creature under heaven"? I would also ask that you give specific attention to Matthew 24:14 and the phrase "as a testimony to all nations." What is the purpose of the "testimony" if it is not to offer unlimited atonement to "all nations"?

A: Please don't misunderstand, Jesus also warned, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21, NIV) Truly, the atonement of Jesus is limited, but it is only limited by those who refuse to do the will of the "Father who is in heaven." Unlike the doctrines of Calvinism, the Holy Spirit teaches that atonement is available to "the whole world," "all nations," "all the world," "all creation" and "every creature under heaven." Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Additional Passages for Further Study:

1 Timothy 2:3-6 (NIV)

"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people."

Titus 2:11 (NIV)

"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."

1 John 2:2 (NIV)

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Application:

There can be little unity among Christians as long as human doctrines dominate and selective obedience governs hermeneutics (principles for interpreting Scripture). Only by submitting to the whole counsel of God can we correctly handle the word of truth. We must raise our sights higher than the teachings of men.

2 Timothy 2:15, NIV

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

Calvin's T.U.L.I.P. I is for Irresistible Grace

In the Words of Calvin:

John Calvin (Institutes 2.4.14; Calvin 1960:308)

"There Augustine first teaches: the human will does not obtain grace by freedom, but obtains freedom by grace; when the feeling of delight has been imparted through the same grace, the human will is formed to endure; it is strengthened with unconquerable fortitude; controlled by grace, it never will perish, but, if grace forsake it, it will straightway fall...."

Calvin believed and taught that grace was not chosen but rather assigned by God without our freewill. In other words, salvation is not an option for everyone. It does not come because a person chooses to seek God, it comes because a person is assigned that condition without their choice.

In the Words of God:

James 1:21 (NIV)

"Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

Q: If **Irresistible Grace** means we have no ability to accept salvation by grace, why are we told to "accept" that which "can save" us? Doesn't this verse imply that it is our acceptance of the word that gives the planted word an opportunity to grow into salvation? But why is there a need for our acceptance if grace is irresistible? Why does the last phrase say, "can save you" rather than "will save you"?

A: Please don't misunderstand, James also said, "But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'" (James 4:6, NIV) Truly God is the only source of grace and He gives it at His own volition. But don't skip over that last phrase, "shows favor to the humble." Doesn't humility require choice? Was it not that very same word which was used in the previous passage, James 1:21, "humbly accept the word" (NIV)? Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

1 Corinthians 15:2 (NIV)

"By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

Q: If **Irresistible Grace** means that grace cannot be resisted, why does the Holy Spirit place a condition on salvation by using the word "if"? Why admonish Christians to "hold firmly" if it is impossible to let go? Why does Paul suggest that it is possible to believe "in vain" if grace is given without our freewill and is, in fact, irresistible?

A: Please don't misunderstand, later in the same context, Paul goes on to make this admission, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them —yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10, NIV) Certainly, Paul understood that grace was the sole power behind his work and it was, therefore, only God Who received the glory. But does this verse imply that Paul was without free will? Read the last two words of this verse again - "with me". Notice the partnership implied by that phrase. God provided the power, but Paul was responsible for making the freewill choice to give Him access to his heart. (See Philippians 2:12-13.) Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Revelation 3:19-21 (NIV)

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."

Q: If **Irresistible Grace** means the saved have no ability to choose grace, why did Jesus say these words? Why would He "rebuke and discipline" with the words "be earnest and repent" if we can't resist grace? Why use the word "if" if there is no option to resist grace? Why tell us that we need to open the door if we have no choice and grace is irresistible?

A: Please don't misunderstand, the apostle Paul certainly was correct when he said, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV). But equally true are the words of Jesus (Revelation 3:19-21). We must be "earnest." We must "repent." It is not enough to assume that we are saved just because we hear His voice. Jesus says it is the one who "hears" and "opens the door" that will eat with Him and will be "victorious" in the end. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Additional Passages for Further Study:

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NIV)

"As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

Romans 3:24-25 (NIV)

"...all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood —to be received by faith."

Romans 5:1 (NIV)

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

Galatians 5:4 (NIV)

"You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

Galatians 5:7-8 (NIV)

"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you."

Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)

"See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

Application:

There can be little unity among Christians as long as human doctrines dominate and selective obedience governs hermeneutics (principles for interpreting Scripture). Only by submitting to the whole counsel of God can we correctly handle the word of truth. We must raise our sights higher than the teachings of men.

2 Timothy 2:15, NIV

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Calvin's T.U.L.I.P.

P is for Perseverance of the Saints ("Once Saved, Always Saved")

In the Words of Calvin:

John Calvin (Institutes 2.5.3; Calvin 1960:320)

"For perseverance itself is indeed also a gift of God, which he does not bestow on all indiscriminately, but imparts to whom he pleases. If one seeks the reason for the difference—why some steadfastly persevered, and others fail out of instability—none occurs to us other than that the Lord upholds the former, strengthening them by his own power, that they may not perish; while to the latter, that they may be examples of inconstancy, he does not impart the same power."

Like all other areas of his doctrine, Calvin believed and taught that humanity had no freewill power to preserve salvation. Just as it was awarded without choice, it is preserved without any effort on the part of the receiver. According to Calvin, humanity is without responsibility.

In the Words of God:

2 Peter 2:20-22 (NIV)

"If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and, 'A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.'"

Q: If **Perseverance of the Saints** means "once saved always saved," what was Peter talking about in these verses? What did the Holy Spirit mean when He warned that if a person "escaped the corruption of the world" then was "again entangled in it" and "overcome" that he would be "worse off" than at the beginning? How is it possible for people to escape the corruption of the world then "turn their backs on the sacred command" without that meaning they were once saved but lost their salvation? Why does He use such graphic illustrations of walking away from salvation, ("A dog returns to its vomit"), if losing one's salvation isn't a graphic possibility?

A: Please don't misunderstand, the Lord did say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29, NIV) Certainly no other human power has the ability to rob us of our salvation. But does this passage mean that we cannot remove ourselves from His hand? If we are unable to make the freewill choice to turn our backs "on the sacred command" (NIV), why does Paul give that exact warning in 2 Peter 2:20-22, above? Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 (NIV)

"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

Q: If **Perseverance of the Saints** means it is impossible to walk away from salvation, why did the Holy Spirit inspire the Apostle Paul to write these words? Why illustrate the seriousness of their condition with the earliest possible example of human departure from God's protection? Why express concern that they might be "led astray" from a "devotion to Christ" if it is not possible to walk away from a devotion to Christ?

A: Please don't misunderstand, Paul also said, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39, NIV) But does this list exclude our own freewill choice to separate ourselves from the love of God? Eve made that freewill choice when she acted rebelliously toward the command of God. And, in our passage above (2 Corinthians 11:2-3), Paul is clearly concerned that his Christian readers will be "led astray" by choosing to act just like her. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Galatians 5:4 (NIV)

"You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

Q: If **Perseverance of the Saints** means it is impossible to fall from grace, what was Paul saying when he wrote this passage to the

Christians of Galatia? Why did the Holy Spirit inspire him to tell Christians they have been "alienated from Christ" if they were once saved, always saved? Why did he come right out and say, "...you have fallen away from grace" if they couldn't fall from grace? You have to be in a place before you can fall from it. Obviously, they had been in grace at one time (once saved), but had fallen away from grace (not always saved).

A: Please don't misunderstand, Paul did say just a few verses earlier, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." (Galatians 5:1, NIV) But just a few verses later he also said, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you." (Galatians 5:7-8, NIV) Please notice two things from this follow-up passage. 1. It is possible to be "running a good race" and have someone "cut in on you." 2. Not everyone who is called by God responds appropriately to His calling. Some who are called choose to ignore God's call and respond instead to the "persuasion" of the one who "cut in." Conclusion: Just because we are called, it does not necessarily mean we are saved. Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered.

Additional Passages for Further Study:

Galatians 1:6 (NIV)

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."

Galatians 5:7-8 (NIV)

"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you."

Hebrews 2:1-3 (NIV)

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?"

Hebrews 6:4-6 (NIV)

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to

repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Hebrews 13:9 (NIV)

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so."

Application:

There can be little unity among Christians as long as human doctrines dominate and selective obedience governs hermeneutics (principles for interpreting Scripture). Only by submitting to the whole counsel of God can we correctly handle the word of truth. We must raise our sights higher than the teachings of men.

2 Timothy 2:15, NIV

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

*

Part Two

The Applications

Introduction

Every good test culminates with a period of application. In the second part of this material we will attempt to do just that.

In the first section of this material, there was a sentence that was repeated after every Q&A, "Only by submitting to the harmony of these passages can the whole counsel of God be truly discovered." The redundancy of that sentence was intentional. As we have seen, the greatest danger of Calvin's T.U.L.I.P. is that, by adopting his logic, a person is forced to ignore many of the Holy Spirit's words. They are forced to engage in selective obedience. Harmony is sacrificed in order to preserve human doctrine.

Example: during the first Gospel sermon on the very first day of the church, the Holy Spirit commanded that everyone who was repenting of their sin must be baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). In order for Calvin's T.U.L.I.P. to be valid, the freewill choice to be baptized "for the remission of sins" cannot exist. Choosing to be baptized "for the remission of sins" would mean a person was not so fully depraved as to be totally without the ability to choose God. It would mean that a person's election was not unconditional. It would mean that atonement was not limited but rather open to all who would be baptized "for the remission of sins." It would mean that grace could be resisted by simply ignoring the command to be baptized "for the remission of sins." And finally, it would imply that the perseverance of the saints begins and is maintained by freewill choice.

In order to hold on to the logic of Calvin, the authority of the Holy Spirit must be compromised. A person must engage in selective obedience. They must compromise the Holy Spirit's command to be baptized "for the remission of sins" and change it into a casual non-urgency, a convenient outward sign of an inward grace. Please read the entire text (Acts 2:36-41). I ask you, do any of those words communicate casual, convenient or a salvation experience that predates baptism?

In the next section, we will attempt to address several key areas of the Christian experience and the cancerous effects Calvin has had on each.

1. God's Plan of Salvation
2. Baptism's Commanded Essentiality
3. Our Personal Responsibility

4. A Holy Spirit Partnership
5. Our Eternal Security

Let's get started!

1

God's Plan of Salvation

The following material is only a summary. Use it only as a guide and never feel limited to draw from other passages that address the same subject.

Romans 3:23 (NIV)

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,....”

A person must realize he is a sinner.

Romans 6:23 (NIV)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The word “death” in this passage means separation. Here it means separation from God.

A person must understand that, since we have all sinned, our payment (“wages”) for sinning is separation from God eternally (“death” or hell).

Since eternal life is a “gift,” a person must understand there is no way to work hard enough to deserve it. Only God can give this gift and we must be in Jesus to get the gift.

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

“...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Since Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we can accept His forgiveness while we are still sinners. Some say, “I’ll be saved as soon as I break a few of my sinful habits.” That is doing things backwards, according to this verse.

Romans 10:9 (NIV)

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The word “Lord,” in this passage, is far more than just a second name for Jesus. It is also His title or description. The word “Lord” means master, ruler or boss. A person must be willing to publicly admit that he is accepting Jesus as his boss.

The word “believe” also has a far deeper meaning than just mental acknowledgment or confidence. Biblical belief has always been a combination of both confidence and obedience. (See James 2:14-26.) Yes, as this verse says, belief will save you, but only if it is true biblical belief that is full of confident obedience.

This verse specifically says we must have confident obedience to the power of the resurrection. In the last passage of this study, Romans 6:3-4, we will see what a person must do to obey the power of the resurrection.

Romans 2:4 (NIV)

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?”

The word “repentance” refers to the act of turning one's life around, walking in a new direction or following after a new master.

In order to be saved, a person must take responsibility for their actions, reject their earlier lifestyle and begin a pattern of disciplined change.

All of the material thus far has been about our approach to God for salvation. But the Father wants much more. He wants to bring us into the family. It is not enough to just come back to God. We must come inside!

In the remaining material, we will uncover the doorway that leads us inside the salvation of God. Romans 6:23 says, “...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word “in” is such a small word, but it means so very much. Eternal life is not found by just coming back to God, eternal life is found by coming inside.

But how does a person get inside Christ Jesus? The answer is simple and found only a few verses earlier in Romans 6:3, “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus....” Verse four goes on to say that “a new life” comes after one is baptized. Baptism is undoubtedly the door that gets us inside.

Let’s notice this passage more closely.

Roman 6:3-4 (NIV)

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

In this passage, we are told that baptism is the door that leads “into Christ.” It is a very important step. We also find that baptism is a duplication of the greatest event in history - the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Every time a person is baptized, he/she duplicates the very steps that Jesus went through to save us from our sin. Baptism is like an instant replay of Christ’s defeat of Satan. Baptism is God’s favorite instant replay and He loves to see it over and over again.

Please consider a few very important questions about this God-sanctioned doorway. It is very important that you let God answer for Himself, even if it means you have to reject a pre-held position or even the teachings of a most trusted friend. Let God speak.

According to this passage, how does a person get “into Christ”?

According to this passage, is it possible to bury a person in water if you only sprinkle or pour water on their head? The word “baptism” in this passage means to immerse, surround or cover over. We know this for many reasons, but the most obvious is that it is called a burial.

According to this passage, does the “new life” come before or after the burial (baptism)?

According to this passage, is baptism just an outward sign that you were saved at an earlier time? Remember the answer to the last question.

If baptism is the step that washes away your sins and gives you a “new life,” does salvation come before baptism?

Have you been baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of sins?

Are you willing to do things God’s way?

Baptism is not a popular concept among many in the religious world. Many preachers delete baptism from their sermons and only preach that which is convenient. God once warned of a time like this. He said, “...the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” (II Timothy 4:3)

Are you looking for God's message or are you looking for someone to say only what you want to hear? Are you sincerely interested in finding salvation according to God's plan? If you are, then now is the time for you to be honest with yourself and with God. Are you saved? Are you inside Christ? Review the following biblical steps for yourself:

1. You must understand that "all have sinned," including yourself, and that salvation can only be found in the free gift of God. (Romans 3:23, 6:23, 5:8)
2. You must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. (Romans 10:9-10)
3. You must accept Jesus as your personal Lord and master, then confess that fact before men. (Romans 10:9-10)
4. You must be willing to repent or turn from following after evil and focus your life on Christ. (Romans 2:4)
5. You must be willing to die to your own selfish desires. You must be buried in water like Jesus was buried in a tomb and you must be raised out of that water to walk a "new life." (Romans 6:3-4)

Have you done these things? There is no greater feeling than knowing you did it God's way. As we learned earlier, many on the Day of Judgment will expect to go to Heaven, yet be turned away because they failed to do it God's way. Please do not risk your eternal salvation on a feeling or on a confidence that comes from being part of the "majority." Real goodness comes only from God. His opinion is all that matters. How will He judge you?

I leave you with the same advice that was also given to Paul when he was confronted with the decision that you are now facing.

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16, NIV)

2

Baptism's Commanded Essentiality

Some time ago, a friend confronted me about my claim that Calvinism is one of the most damnable doctrines of these end times. Because he is a leader in a church that has been distracted by this destructive teaching, the subject is a sore spot for him and he takes my challenges very personally. I assured him that my only goals were to submit fully to Scripture, teach only what the Bible teaches and rescue the lost from the clutches of the ever popular "Do it MY way entitlement religions."

During our lengthy discussion, the man referenced very few passages of Scripture. The ones to which he did refer weren't quoted and rarely were even given locations. In order to substantiate his claim to a superior appreciation of grace, he repeatedly referenced the positive things his church was doing. He spoke of the atmosphere, the outreach, the family values, etc.

I congratulated my friend on these positive accomplishments, then I returned the conversation to the original topic by asking him a series of very divisive questions. "But does your church insist on obedience to all the commands of Scripture? Does your church teach that Peter's words during the very first Gospel sermon are worthy of submission, Acts 2:38? Does your church teach that baptism is necessary FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS or do you use it as an initiation rite or an outward sign that sins have previously been remitted?"

Awkward silence filled the air. I felt sorry for the man. He was clearly under conviction. I wanted to say something that would end his misery, however, I knew that to do so was to interfere with the working of the Holy Spirit. I waited. Slowly his eyes met mine. "No, we don't teach that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins," he confessed with a tone of regret.

For a brief moment I had great respect for my friend's willingness to process and submit to scriptural authority. For a brief moment I was hopeful, I was prayerful that he would actually embrace the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Then it happened. Just one word. A very small word. Yet, even though this tiny word is only comprised of three letters, it often introduces a giant excuse, which almost always marks a Hellish victory for Satan's cause. The man's eyes glazed over. Defiance refilled his heart and he said it.

"But..."

My Personal Heartfelt Confession:

Satan has a very big "But..." and I am so very weary of watching it get in the way of God's will!

Matthew 7:22-23 (NKJV) "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

When will we ever learn to be fully submissive to the will of God?! When will we look beyond Satan's "But..." and realize that no church activity, congregational statistic or religious accomplishment is great enough to trump the authority of the Lord's holy command?

Do you know why Jesus will say, "...depart from Me," even though they have prophesied, cast out demons and done many other great works in His name? Read the previous verse.

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

We can call ourselves Christian all day long. We can claim a superior knowledge of grace all we want. We can rest on our laurels and take confidence in our accomplishments, but when the Lord returns, He says that the only ones going with Him are the ones who have done THE WILL OF THE FATHER!

What about you? Does your church submit fully to the full plan of salvation? Have you done THE WILL OF THE FATHER? Have you been baptized FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS?

In Colossians 2, we find three essential elements to this surgical procedure performed by the very hands of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:9-12 (NIV)

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Before noticing each part of this surgical process, please be sure to give special attention to the underlined words above. Baptism is the operating

room. Because the operation occurs in baptism, it is critical that we view immersion as more than just a convenient initiation ceremony. Baptism must be taught as an essential part of the salvation process. According to the words of the Holy Spirit, baptism is the very point at which sins are cut away (circumcision). Due to the importance of the Surgeon and His work, immersion must not be seen as an outward sign of an inward grace. To view baptism in that way implies that a person is healed before surgery and it diminishes the urgent importance of this commanded procedure. Baptism is the surgical entry point of grace.

According to Colossians 2:9-12, three surgical realities take place in baptism:

1. The patient is made whole. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness." (Vs. 9) It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, we fully identify with the Divine presence. We are no longer separated by sin. Our relationship with the Creator is restored.
2. The patient is made clean. "Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ." (Vs. 11) It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, which the contaminating areas of our spiritual character are cut away.
3. The patient is made new. "...in which you were also raised with him...." (Vs. 12) Romans 6:4 (NIV) puts it this way, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." It is in baptism, Christ's operating room, that the metamorphic process of spiritual renewal takes place.

From this passage, it becomes vividly clear that spending time in Christ's operating room is essential to one's salvation. Patients must understand that, by God's design, the surgery has to come before the healing. To view baptism as an outward sign of an inward grace confuses the process. Healing cannot come without first experiencing Christ's surgery. Salvation cannot precede the operating room - baptism. When the entry point of grace becomes an after-the-fact ceremony of symbolic gestures, the celebration devalues the work of Christ in baptism and the foundation of conversion is eroded.

Conclusion

Just before making the statement which I cited above (Matthew 7:21), Jesus gave this very important warning to His followers, "Beware of false

prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15, NKJV)

Know this, when Satan's "But..." gets in the way, you can be fully assured that ravenous wolves have gone to feeding. The only way to survive their attack is to drop the "But...", hit the knees and call out toward Heaven, "Not my will, but Thine be done!"

Submission to the full counsel of God is essential! Taking Him at His Word without interference from any manmade doctrine is the only way to escape the warning of Matthew 7:15-21! Will you do it? Will you pursue Him with wide-eyed abandonment? Will you engage in full-throttle submission?

Temptation

*Sometimes it's hard to choose what's best,
Select the right and pass the test,
To push aside that stubborn will,
To tell the selfish voice, "Be still!"*

*When Satan's "But..." gets in my way,
I close my eyes and then I pray,
"Lord, lead me through the half-truth lies.
Please shield me from the compromise."*

*I ask for strength to see His will,
To yield, submit, obey until
The Lord returns in bright array
And takes me home. Oh, what a day!!*

3

Our Personal Responsibility

The following Facebook post by my son, Bryson, really stirred my mental juices:

"Victoria, Gabriel and I were in Walmart today and we accidentally knocked down one of the displays. Of course, our natural reaction was to begin picking up what we had knocked over, but the thing that surprised me was how many times the Walmart employees thanked us for picking it up. What do people usually do when they make a mess in Walmart?"

I posted this response:

"Unfortunately, the entitlement culture we live in conditions us to think that grace eliminates our need to have any part in cleaning up our own mess. Doesn't just apply to Walmart."

Allow me to explain that last sentence with a modern-day parable about salvation.

Once upon a time you were having a no good, very bad day. In your angry haste to get out of Walmart, you knocked a jar of pickles off the shelf. The contents splattered several fellow shoppers and sprayed all over the aisle. The pungent pickle aroma from the stink bomb exploding at your feet rapidly threatened to overtake the store. Panic gripped your heart.

Question: Do you have any responsibility in a situation such as that?

But what if you don't know where the cleaning supplies are kept? What if the rapidly spreading pickle juice is becoming a hazard to other shoppers? What if you are unable to contain the spill? What if it is simply beyond your ability to clean up your own mess? What then?

Bigger Question: Do you still have a responsibility in a situation such as that?

Many in the religious world have concluded that, because we are totally incapable of saving ourselves, all personal responsibility in the salvation process is eliminated. Calvinism thrives on this reasoning. It promotes a doctrine perfectly suited for America's entitlement culture.

But what does the Bible say?

John 7:17 (NIV)

"Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

Acts 2:40-41 (NIV)

"With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Acts 17:26 (NIV) "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him...."

1 Corinthians 15:2 (NIV) "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you."

2 Corinthians 6:1 (NIV)

"As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."

1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV)

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Philippians 1:27 (NIV)

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

James 1:10 (NIV)

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."

James 1:21 (NIV)

"Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Let's go back to the pickles.

So there you are standing alone in an aisle that is overwhelmed by the stench and broken glass of your mistake. You are helpless. You are incapable of saving yourself. What do you do in a situation such as that? I know what many in our entitlement culture would do - they would walk away.

Very Important Application: Even the lost have choices. Even the lost have responsibility. Even the lost are expected to acknowledge their condition and accept help from the One Who can clean up their mess.

Does their request for help make up for their mistake? No.

Does their request for help earn the assistance from another? No.

Does their request for help give them the right to claim they cleaned up their own mess? No.

The only thing their decision allows them to claim is that they made an unfortunate mistake, they chose to humbly surrender to capabilities of another and now they owe that person a very great debt of gratitude.

Conclusion:

We cannot save ourselves! But making a mess does not give us the right to walk away from it, even if we can't clean it up ourselves. It does not give us the right to claim an entitlement version of grace without responsibility. There is only one Person Who can cleanse the mess we have made. Only He can save us. Only He receives the glory for our salvation. But we still have responsibility! We must surrender to Him!

James 4:7-8 (NIV) "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you."

4

A Holy Spirit Partnership

As the end times play out before us, it is of vital importance that Christians be alert. Alert not only to the coming of Christ, but also to the condition He will find us in when He returns. A focused, disciplined Christian walk is essential in order to keep us from succumbing to the teachings of false prophets.

Matthew 24:10-13 (NIV)

“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

During these times of high alert, nothing is more important than your relationship with the Holy Spirit. Do not be guilty of quenching His influence in your life. He will convict you, grow you and discipline you.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)

“...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

Please notice the partnership between the “work” we are called to do and the “works” God has promised to do within us.

Paul explains that partnership further in another inspired writing.

Romans 8:16-17 (NIV)

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Notice the phrase, “...if indeed we share in his sufferings”. What are these sufferings? Obviously most of us will not endure a crucifixion, so how do we share in the sufferings of Christ? The very next verses explain.

Romans 8:18-21 (NIV)

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,

in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

Our shared suffering comes when we allow God’s will to work within us. His Spirit partners with us to overcome the fallen conditions of this world. Just as Christ prayed, “not my will but thine be done” (Luke 22:42, KJV), we too must engage in the ongoing battle to keep God’s will first in our life.

The partnership between the Holy Spirit and us is this; we must work out our salvation by engaging in an ongoing, vigilant surrender of our heart.

Notice what Paul said just prior to our context.

Romans 8:12-13 (NIV)

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

The partnership between the Holy Spirit and us is this; we must work out our salvation by engaging in an ongoing, vigilant surrender of our heart.

When a person receives the Holy Spirit at baptism (Acts 2:38), they do not lose their identity. They do not sacrifice their free will. When a person receives the Holy Spirit, they do not become the Holy Spirit, they become partners with Him. To maintain this relationship, the Spirit works and they do too.

For anyone to suggest that a Christian’s work of spiritual maintenance is unimportant, they must also diminish a Christian’s status as a free moral agent. Christians are not spiritual robots. We are created in God’s image. Our will, our choice and the work we do to maintain a relationship with the Spirit is significant.

Notice what Paul says toward the end of this marvelous context.

Romans 8:28-30 (NIV)

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

God does not want any of His creation to perish. Instead, He wants everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) To assure us of this

opportunity, God has called all of us by His Gospel. (Galatians 1:11) However, God “foreknew” that only part of His creation would accept this calling. Because He is not limited by time, God is able to look into the future and know the results of our life decisions before we even make them. With this foreknowledge, He is also able to pre-determine our eternal destiny.

Does this predestination override our free will to chose God? If it does, why give everyone a chance to come to repentance? (2 Peter 3:9) Why call everyone by the gospel? (Mark 16:15, Matthew 24:14) Why “call” us at all? Does not the word “call” indicate an invitation? Does not an invitation indicate a choice? If Romans 8:28-30 is indicating a predestination that overrides our free will, why does Paul instruct Christians just a few verses earlier to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” in order to live? (Romans 8:13, NIV)

Our predestination is determined by what God foreknows about the choices we are making and will continue to make in the future. The only way to be sure of a positive predestination is to be sure to keep your Holy Spirit partnership alive. Be alert! Give God uninterrupted access to your heart and He will join you in the ongoing process of working out your salvation. (Philippians 2:12-13) If you remain within that process, He will remain within you. You will also remain in the light and, thereby, you will be able to celebrate full assurance of your eternal security.

During these last days of a spiritual warfare that will determine the final destination of your soul, few things are more important than your partnership with the Holy Spirit. Don't quench His influence in your life. Embrace the partnership.

5

Our Eternal Security

1 John 5:13 is a powerful passage that begs for application in the lives of every Christian. In one small verse, John not only summarizes the entire book but also states the certainty of a blessed assurance.

1 John 5:13 (NIV)

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Not guess, not wonder, not hope, not maybe; the Holy Spirit says Christians can “know” they have eternal life.

In the opening verses of this great book, John explains how a person can avoid God’s fury and arrive at a confidence of salvation.

1 John 1:5-10

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

In this passage, John records three very important principles about walking in the light.

1. Walking in the Light is a Journey, Not a Single Step

If ever there was a lesson that must be taught with conviction, it is this one. Life is a journey, not a single step. Walking in the light is a process, not a point in time. Like physical birth, the point of salvation can certainly be traced to the moment a person leaves the womb of water. (John 3:5, Romans 6:4) But, like any journey, this single step does not constitute a completed process. Faith, growth and unyielding spiritual endurance is also essential.

2. Walking in the Light Brings Fellowship With God

In verse 7, we are told that "... if we walk in the light we have fellowship with one another..." Although the context may be talking about fellowship between Christians, it is important to remember that no fellowship is possible without God and Jesus at its center. In verse 3, John stated this fact when he said, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

Many, it seems, believe that attending Christian services makes a person a Christian. This verse clearly shows that all lasting fellowship is first rooted in a relationship with God, not first in a relationship with the church. God saves and then adds to the church. (Acts 2:47) The church does not save and simple identification with a church bearing a biblical name does not constitute salvation.

3. Walking in the Light Does Not Mean Sinlessness

In verse 7, John says that walking in the light means that the blood of Jesus "purifies us from all sin." If walking in the light meant sinlessness, then there would be no sin to purify.

In the very next verse he goes on to say, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Obviously, John is not talking about a sinless, perfect walk; he is talking about a journey that is under constant purification in spite of our sin.

Does this mean once a person is saved they can never lose that salvation? No, read on. In order for a person to remain on the path of light, there are three things that John says they must do. Notice the immediate context.

1. To remain on the path of light, a Christian must be honest about his sinful nature. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Whenever a person denies the sin he has committed, he strays from the path and the light of God no longer governs his journey.
2. To remain on the path of light, a Christian must confess the sin that his honesty has revealed. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)
3. To remain on the path of light, a Christian must make continual application of God's Word in his life. "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

(1 John 1:10) When a Christian makes continual application of God's Word in his life, it reveals his sin (point 1) so that he can confess his sin (point 2) and he can continue on the journey of applying God's Word to his life (point 3).

Yes, it certainly is possible to lose one's salvation. Consider the stories of Simon (Acts 8) and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10). Read what Peter has to say about falling from a "secure position" (2 Peter 3:17).

But it is equally certain that a Christian who honestly confesses his sin, through constant application of God's Word, can "know" that he has eternal life - that he is saved. (1 John 5:13)

Conclusion

The Certainty Cycle:

Step 1 - When a Christian makes continual application of God's Word in his life, it reveals sin. (1 John 1:8)

Step 2 - He confesses his sin. (1 John 1:9)

Step 3 - He continues on the journey of applying God's Word to his life. (1 John 1:10) That application leads him to the discovery of more sin which returns him to step one. The process is repeated.

Staying in the cycle means staying in the light and staying in the light is where the continual cleansing of sin is found.

*Note: This confidence is only promised to those who are Christians. Have you submitted to **God's plan** for salvation? See Part 2.1.*

SUPPLEMENTS

The following supplements are provided to address two of the favorite arguments used by Calvinists.

Acts 10 is often used to circumvent the saving essentiality of baptism.

Romans 9 is often used to substantiate the absence of freewill.

As you will see, both arguments are predicated on the assumption that election (God's favor) and redemption (God's salvation) are synonymous.

*

Supplement 1

Acts 10, Cornelius

"An outward sign of an inward grace?"

Acts 10 seems to be a ready-made passage for those who desperately want to find at least one biblical example that reduces baptism to a post-salvation symbolic act ("an outward sign of an inward grace"). But is it possible that, in their desperation to validate a human bias, they are distracted from the greater responsibility to submit to the whole counsel of God?

At least 3 important questions need to be asked about the watershed moment being described in Acts 10:

1. If Cornelius and his friends were saved before baptism, what did Christ circumcise during their baptism?
2. Does Divine intervention always indicate salvation or can it simply indicate that God has employed someone or something through Divine validation?
3. Why would God introduce such an obvious anomaly into the consistent biblical pattern of assigning miraculous gifts after baptism?

Let's look at each of these questions individually and then combine the results in conclusion.

1. If Cornelius and his friends were saved before baptism, what did Christ circumcise during their baptism?

It should be noted that Peter insisted on Cornelius and the others being baptized even after the miraculous sign was witnessed by all. Why? If their baptisms were only intended to be a formality that showed they were already saved ("an outward sign of an inward grace'), wouldn't baptism seem a little anti-climactic? Perhaps an even bigger question is this, what would a purely symbolic baptism say about Jesus and His role in that baptism?

Colossians 2:11-12 (NIV)

"In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were

circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

In Colossians 2:11-12, the Holy Spirit clearly teaches that baptism is the very point at which Jesus performs the Divine operation called circumcision. It is the very point at which He removes sin from the heart. When baptism is reduced to a level of symbolism, the Surgeon is reduced to the role of a Public Relations Manager. Jesus deserves more!

If Cornelius was only being baptized as a post-salvation symbol, one very obvious question needs to be asked: What good did a symbolic baptism accomplish, given the fact that the Holy Spirit had already given such a dramatic validation with the gift of tongues? How could a symbolic baptism possibly top the reality of what the Holy Spirit had already done? Why would they even try to top the outward sign of the Spirit's miraculous intervention?

I suggest that the only thing that can top an external miracle done for validation is an internal miracle done for salvation. Cornelius and his friends were baptized for the very same reason that everyone was baptized on the opening day of the church, "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38, NKJV) Their healing (salvation) did not precede their surgery (baptism).

2. Does Divine intervention always indicate salvation or can it simply indicate that God has employed someone or something through Divine validation?

In Acts 19, the Holy Spirit makes a clear separation between the saving power of baptism and the validating power of the Holy Spirit's gifts.

In Ephesus, Paul finds several men who were disciples but lacked a proper baptism. It seems that, in their pursuit of Christianity, they had only been immersed into John's baptism, a baptism of repentance. Paul explains that John the Baptist's baptism lost its purpose once Jesus had come and now they needed to be baptized in the name of Christ.

It is interesting to note that, in Acts 19:5, they obeyed Paul's instructions by being baptized in the name of The Lord Jesus. Yet it was later, in Acts 19:6, that they received the Holy Spirit gifts of tongues and prophecy.

Q: Why were the two events separated?

A: Because a person submits to baptism in order to be saved, but the Holy Spirit assigns gifts to a person in order to validate them or their message. One shows Divine employment, the other Divine healing.

Is there a difference between salvation and validation? Absolutely! Notice three examples.

1. In Numbers 22:28, God made Balaam's donkey speak in tongues. Should we assume that the donkey was saved? No, God simply gave the donkey a brief moment of validation in order to employ him for a temporary job.
2. In Daniel 4:28-37, God employed a pagan king to receive Divinely inspired prophetic messages through dreams. Should we conclude that Nebuchadnezzar was saved at the time of these Divine interventions? If so, then why did God punish the pagan king of Babylon for arrogantly ignoring His message? In spite of direct Divine intervention, Nebuchadnezzar was transformed into a human animal that ate grass like an ox and grew nails like the claws of a bird. Was Nebuchadnezzar saved because God spoke through him? No, God simply gave this grass-grazing ox/king an experience of validation in order to remind him and the world that it is still God Who governs the thrones of men.
3. In Acts 9, Saul (Paul) experienced a Divine intervention when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He experienced a second intervention when he was healed of blindness in the city. Did these miraculous signs mean that Saul was saved without baptism? If so, then why does Ananias urgently admonish him after the vision and the healing, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name"? (Acts 22:16, NIV)

Since Saul's sins were not removed at the time of the miraculous events, it is safe to assume that Divine intervention does not remove the need for Divine surgery (baptism). It seems obvious that Saul's pre-baptism Divine interventions were not given to indicate salvation but rather to validate Saul and set up Ananias so that he could urge him into the operating room. Is it possible that this is the same reason the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends before baptism?

3. Why would God introduce such an obvious anomaly into the consistent, biblical pattern of assigning miraculous gifts after baptism?

The word "anomaly" is used here with great intent. It means "deviation from the regular arrangement, general rule, or usual method." (Webster's Dictionary) Receiving the validation of supernatural gifts before being baptized was a deviation from the usual method.

Why did God employ such an attention-grabbing measure in this unique situation? Because it was just that - unique. Not since Abraham had the Gentile world been invited into the favor of God. For thousands of years, Gentiles had been looked down upon and rejected. This moment was not just about Cornelius' salvation; it was also about a very important pivotal point in history. God employed dramatic measures because He wanted everyone to know that it was He, not Peter or any other man, Who was validating this historical transition from "Jews Only!" to "Everyone Invited!" In order for that moment to be believed, the invitation required a direct intervention from God.

Note: Even if a person were to argue that Cornelius was saved before baptism, and I do not, it would still need to be viewed as the exception to the rule, not the rule itself. Immaturity is often marked by a preoccupation with exceptions to the rule or a search for ways to get around the rule. Spiritual maturity, on the other hand, leads the faithful into full surrender to the whole counsel of God.

Conclusion

There is a great difference between being employed by God and being saved by Him.

In Luke 19:39-40, Jesus said that God could employ rocks to cry out if His Son was not given praise. Are we to conclude that the rocks would be saved?

In Matthew 27:19, it seems that Pilate's wife was also employed by God in a dream to declare Jesus an "innocent man." (NIV) Are we to conclude that Pilate's wife was saved?

In Acts 19:11-12, God employed handkerchiefs as a way to pass along the healing powers of Paul. Are we to conclude that the handkerchiefs were saved?

In Genesis 41:25, God employed a pagan Pharaoh of Egypt to receive messages from God that would save His people from a famine. Are we to conclude that the pagan Pharaoh was saved?

In Numbers 22:28, God employed a donkey to speak a warning to His stubborn prophet Balaam. Are we to conclude that the donkey was saved?

On the other hand...

In Acts 8:9-17, we find that it is equally possible to be saved yet not be employed to do miracles.

Application: From rocks and handkerchiefs to a pagan Pharaoh and a donkey, it seems clear that employment by God and salvation by God are not the same thing. The anomaly of Acts 10 should not be used to suggest that salvation comes before baptism. Those who do so expose their own desperation to validate a human bias rather than submitting to the abundance of examples and directives that confirm the saving power of Christ's surgery found within baptism.

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Supplement 2

Romans 9, Jacob, Esau and Pharaoh "Unconditionally Elected?"

Romans chapter 9 is the "bread and butter" text of Calvinism. When all else fails, they are sure to default to this passage.

Romans 9:6-24 (NIV)

"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'

Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses,

'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?' But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for

destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory — even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?"

Observations

While this passage does present some controversial language, there are at least two very important facts that must be kept in mind before turning these words into a blanket validation of Calvin's doctrine of salvation.

1. Romans 9 is only one very small part of a much greater context. Until it is discovered how this chapter harmonizes with the rest of the book and all other scriptural authority, a proper conclusion cannot be drawn.
2. In order to draw that proper conclusion, Romans 9 must be interpreted through its specific context.

One of the primary themes of the book of Romans is a contrast between the meritorious works of the Old Law (The Levitical Code of sacrifices) and the unmerited favor of the New Law. The Jews, like Esau, hunted after righteousness through meritorious works. They, like Esau, missed the blessing because they chose to depend upon their own merit rather than choosing to depend upon the blessing giver.

The specific theme of chapter 9 is best seen in verse 6, " But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel." (NIV) In other words, God's will is not thwarted just because some of the elect have rejected their election. Calvinists would disagree. They would argue that the elect cannot reject their election, because it is "unconditional." (The U in Calvin's T.U.L.I.P) However, I remind you of Matthew 24:22-24 where Jesus warns that the elect must remain alert lest they be deceived by false teachers. I further remind you of 2 Peter 1:5-10 that tells us we must make every effort to make our election sure. Remember, Esau was originally the favored son. He was the elected son until false security led him to believe that receiving the blessing of his father depended upon his own merit. In the same way, the Jew was the favored son. He was the elected son until false security led him to believe that receiving the blessing of God depended upon his own merit.

Q: Does election infer salvation or does election simply infer selection? All of Israel was God's elect. (See 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalms 135:4; Isaiah 41:8, 45:4.) Yet not all of Israel remained elect.

(See Romans 11:7.) Part of the elect was hardened because they chose to seek the blessing through merit. As a result, God rejected part of the elect and selected the remaining faithful to become His elect.

Both election and salvation come totally as a result of God's grace. However, God's election (the advantages He gives to some, Romans 9:18) and His salvation (the potential He gives to all, 2 Peter 3:9) are not always given according to the same criteria. Election is assigned in the same manner that a potter gives purpose to his clay. (See Romans 9:19-21.) Salvation is assigned according to belief. (See the same context, Romans 9:30-32; 10:4.)

In John 6:28-29, Jesus says that belief is a work, "Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'" (NIV) According to the words of God's own Son, belief is a work. It is an exercise of freewill that places trust in God. But like baptism, repentance and confession, belief is not intended to be a work of merit. It is not done to earn salvation, but rather to accept salvation.

Application: God elects like a potter who molds clay according to his will, but He saves like a father who witnesses belief in His children.

Consider this inspired description of God's predetermined election. Notice the difference between God's favor and His salvation.

Acts 17:26-27 (NIV)

"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

In verse 26, God shows His favor or election to "all nations" by marking out "appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."

In verse 27, God shows the potential of His salvation that can result from favor or election if we choose to "reach out for him and find him...."

Conclusion

When Romans 9 is interpreted through the harmony of Scripture and the entirety of its context, the doctrine of unconditional election stands. It is true, God favors whom He wills. (Romans 9:18) But it must be understood that the doctrine found within this harmony of Scripture is not the doctrine of "Unconditional Election" according to Calvin. As we have seen, election and salvation are not necessarily the same thing. Only when election and salvation are viewed as complements and not synonyms can the harmony of Scripture be understood. Calvin would have us believe that, absent our freewill, God preordained those who would be saved and He preselected those who would be damned. Furthermore, that flawed conclusion forced him to also assume that Jesus did not die for everyone but, rather, He limited His atonement for only a select few.

As I end this supplement, I wish to quote from one of the most well known verses in the entire Bible. As I do, I plead with you to compare God's beautiful declaration of universal love with Calvin's disturbing view of God's limited grace. You decide which is true.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

" For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Does that sound like "Limited Atonement" to you?

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