

CALVINISM - EARLY CHRISTIANS AND CALVINISM

by Query Bible

An examination of whether the early church fathers held views consistent with Calvinism, querying the historical evidence for Reformed doctrines such as predestination, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints in the writings of the ante-Nicene and post-Nicene fathers.

4 Chapters

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01 - Calvinism: Absent Among Pre-Nicene Christians

Calvinism: Absent Among Pre-Nicene Christians The early Christians were fluent in New Testament Greek for the first several centuries A.D. They studied the scriptures diligently, and they loved to teach the doctrines of God's grace and man's freedom to choose. Some Calvinists, such as John Gill and ..., maintain early Christians were doctrinally Calvinistic on these issues. However, a large body of writing from the early Church Fathers exists, and demonstrates early Christians were definitely non-Calvinist. Examine the following quotations, and see that they are not reconcilable with the view that the early church fathers were Calvinistic. One cannot affirm 5-point Calvinism and teach Unbelievers have free will to do good or respond to God, Christ died for all people, We have the power to turn ourselves to Christ, or We can lose our salvation. The format of the references is Vol::PageNo.

Clement bishop of Rome 97/98 A.D. (justified all men) 1:13 "...being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever." First Clement 32.

Epistle of Barnabas 100 A.D. 1:139 (losing salvation) "Take heed, lest resting at our ease, as those who are the called [of God], we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, acquiring power over us, should thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord." 1:139 (chap. 4) "This means that the man perishes justly, who, having a knowledge of the way of righteousness, rushes off into the way of darkness. (chap. 5) (Presumably the way of righteousness is open to him).

Ignatius, disciple of John & bishop of Antioch 107 A.D. ~1:88 "Only you must pray for them, if by any means they may be brought back to repentance." Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 4.

Mathetes 130 A.D. 1:25 "Come, then after you have freed [or purified] yourself from all prejudices possessing your mind" 1:29 "having been a disciple of the Apostles..." To Diognetus 2, 10.

"as a Savior He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God." chapter 7

Polycarp, John's disciple, bishop of Smyrna 100-150 A.D. 1:33 "But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness..." Philip. 2.

Shepherd of Hermas 160 A.D. 2:36 "...and reflecting on the commandments, that they are excellent, and powerful, and glorious, and able to save a man's soul" Shepherd of Hermas 6:1.

Justin Martyr wrote 135-165 A.D. 1:177 "And again, unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions..." 1:177 "The words cited above, David uttered 1500 years before Christ... But lest some suppose, from

what has been said by us, that we say that whatever happens, happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain." 1:177 most of the page. The First Apology of Justin 43, 44.

Athenagoras 177 A.D. 2:142 "Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honour the good or punish the bad, unless and vice and virtue were in their own power" A Plea for Christians 24

Theophilus bishop of Antioch after Ignatius 168-181 A.D. 2:91 "And this is your condition, because of the blindness of your soul, and the hardness of your heart. But, if you will, you may be healed. Entrust yourself to the Physician [God], and He will couch the eyes of your soul and of your heart." To Autolycus 7.

Tatian (later turned heretic) 110-172 A.D. "brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice, in order that the bad man may be justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault, but the just man be deservedly praised for his virtuous deeds, since in the exercise of this free choice he refrained from transgressing the will of God." ... "And the power of the Logos, having in itself a faculty to foresee future events, not as fated, but as taking place by the choice of free agents..." Address of Tatian to the Greeks ch.7 p.67-68.

Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp & bishop of Lyons (177-202 A.D.) 1:347 "they [unbelievers] despise the workmanship of God, speaking against their own salvation.", 1:455 "[God] did indeed show Himself to be long-suffering in the matter of the correction of man and the probation of all" 1:456 "indicating that eternal fire was not originally prepared for man, but for him [Satan] who beguiled man, and caused him to offend" Against Heresies Book 1 ch.22.

Minucius Felix 210 A.D. 4:195 "determines also the fates for us according to the deserts and qualities of individuals." The Octavius of Minucius Felix 36.

Clement of Alexandria 193-217 A.D. 2:319 "Now the devil, being possessed of freewill, was able both to repent and to steal;" 2:239 "So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins" Stromata Book 1 ch.17. vol.2:239 "For to take fever is involuntary; but when one takes fever through his own fault, from excess, we blame him. Inasmuch, then as evil is involuntary, -for no one prefers evil as evil;...such being the case, to free ourselves from ignorance, and from evil and voluptuous choice, and above all, to withhold our assent from those delusive phantasies, depends on ourselves." The Instructor 2:1. also last chapter.

"Everything then, which did not hinder a man's choice from being free, He made and rendered auxiliary to virtue," Stromata 7:2

"And how is He Saviour and Lord, if not the Saviour and Lord of all? But He is the Saviour of those who have believed, because of their wishing to know; and the Lord of those who have not believed, till, being enabled to confess him, they obtain the peculiar and appropriate boon which comes by Him." (Stromata 7:2)

Bardaisan of Syria 154-222 A.D. "But God, in His benignity, chose not so to make man; but by freedom He exalted him above many of His creatures. fragments quoted from Forster & Marston

Hippolytus, disciple of Irenaeus and Bishop of Portus 220-236 A.D. 5:152 “[Jesus] might exhibit His own manhood as an aim for all men. And that by Himself in person He might prove that God made nothing evil, and that man possesses the capacity of self-determination, inasmuch as he is able to will and not to will, and is endued with the power to do both.” Refutat. of All Heresies 10:29

Tertullian 200-240 A.D. 3:220 (against total depravity) “Still there is a portion of good in the soul, of that original, divine, and genuine good, which is its proper nature. For that which is derived from God is rather obscured than extinguished.” 3:301 “Therefore it was proper that (he who is) the image and likeness of God should be formed with a free will and a mastery of himself; so that this very thing - namely, freedom of will and self-command - might be reckoned as the image and likeness of God in him.” 3:308 “Behold, they [Marcionites] say, how He acknowledges Himself to be the creator of evil in the passage, ‘It is I who created evil.’ They take a word whose one form reduces to confusion and ambiguity two kinds of evils (because both sins and punishments are called evils), and will have Him in every passage to be understood as the creator of all evil things, in order that He may be designated the author of evil.” Against Marcion chap. 14.

Commodianus North African bishop 240 A.D. 4:210 “If you wish to live, surrender yourselves to the second law. Avoid the worship of temples, the oracles of demons; turn yourselves to Christ, and ye shall be associates with God.” Instruction of Commodianus 35.

Origen (strange teacher) 230-254 A.D. 4:240 “This also is clearly defined in the teaching of the Church, that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition;” De Principiis Preface 5.

Novatian (turned schismatic) 254-256 A.D. 5:646 “For in reprobating what He [God] has made, He will appear to have condemned His own works, which He had approved as good; and He will be designated as seeming capricious in both cases, as the heretics indeed would have it;” On the Jewish Meats 2.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage and martyr 248-258 A.D. ~5:317 “watch against the snares of the devil, and, taking care for you own salvation, be diligently on your guard against this death-bearing fallacy.” 5:357 “Keep discipline, lest haply the Lord be angry, and ye perish from the right way, when His anger shall quickly burn against you.” 5:358 Nor let them think that the way of life or of salvation is still open to them, if they have refused to obey the bishops and priests..” Epistle 61.

Archelaus 277 A.D. 6:187 “none of these things can be attributed to the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, but that we must take Satan to be the cause of all our ills.” Disputat. with Manes 13

Theonas of Alexandria 300 A.D. ~6:159 “Therefore you ought to strive to the utmost of your power not to fall into a base or dishonourable, not to say an absolutely flagitious way of thinking...” Epistle to Licianus the Chief Chamberlain 2.

Second Clement 100-300 A.D. 7:522 -lose salvation. Chapter 17

Alexander of Lycopolis 301 A.D. 6:247 “But man, being able to perceive and to judge, and being potentially wise, -for he has the power to become so -when he has received what is peculiar to himself, treads it under foot.” Of the Manichaeans chap. 15.

Arnobius 297-303 A.D. 6:458-459 "To all, He says, the fountain of life is open, and no one is hindered or kept back from drinking. If you are so fastidious as to spurn the kindly offered gift" 6:458-459 "Nay, my opponent says, if God is powerful, merciful, willing to save us, let Him change our dispositions, and compel us to trust in His promises. This, then is violence, not kindness nor the bounty of the Supreme God, but a childish and vain strife in seeking to get the mastery. For what is so unjust as to force men who are reluctant and unwilling, to reverse their inclinations, to impress forcibly on their minds what they are unwilling to receive," Against the Heathen 2:64,65.

Methodius bishop of Olympus, Patara, and Tyre, martyr 260-312 A.D. 6:356-363 Wrote a whole work: Concerning Free Will.

Lactantius, disciple of Arnobius: 260-330 A.D. 7:272 "First of all, when evils befall them, men in their dejected state for the most part have recourse to God; they appease and entreat Him" A Treatise on the Anger of God chapter 16.

Venantius: 7:330 "Who seeing that the human race was plunged in the depth of misery, that Thou mightest rescue man, didst Thyself also become man." Poem on Easter.

Constitutions of the 12 Apostles 4th century 7:489 "...reconciled Thee to the world, and freed all men from the wrath to come" "... and deliver mankind from his deceit." Book 7.

Pre-Nicene Authors Who Were Silent on Calvinism

Alexander bishop of Alexandria (313-326), Alexander bishop of Cappadocia, then Jerusalem (233-250), Anatolius bishop of Laodicea (270-280), Aristides, Asterius Urbanus, The Didache (147), Dionysius bishop of Alexandria (200-265), Dionysius of Rome, Gregory Thaumaturgus (240-265), Julius Africanus (232-245), Peter bishop of Alexandria (310), Victorinus, Liturgy of James, Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles, Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs, Treatise Against Novatian, Treatise on Re-Baptism, and the Councils of Ancyra (314), Neocaesarea (315), Nicea (325). Fragments of Papias (70-155), Caius (180-217), Theognostus (265), Pierius (300), Phileas (307), and Pamphilus (309).

Conclusion

Perhaps we can all agree on Calvinist Loraine Boettner's words: "It may occasion some surprise to discover that the doctrine of Predestination was not made a matter of special study until near the end of the fourth century. ... They of course taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel. Some of their writings contain passages in which the sovereignty of God is recognized; yet along side of those are others which teach the absolute freedom of the human will. ... They taught a kind of synergism in which there was a cooperation between grace and free will." The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination p.365.

02 - Calvinism: Absent Until Augustine

Calvinism: Absent Until Augustine

Introduction

Calvinistic teachings were a “new” doctrine, that nobody had taught in the church until Augustine around 400 A.D., and even Augustine was not a Calvinist. Newness does not automatically prove a doctrine false, but no New Testament Greek speaking Christians saw Calvinism in the Greek New Testament, Calvinists cannot lay claim to the argument that the Bible is full of Calvinism if the only people to see these in the New Testament Greek were people who did not speak New Testament Greek.

Some, but not all Calvinists maintain that one cannot have solid Christian doctrine without being a Calvinist. If this is true, then they must maintain that until Augustine we cannot find a single Christian for 300 years who had solid Christian doctrine. Even many Calvinists would not say that Augustine’s doctrine was solid, as he, among other things, promoted a “Roman Catholic” view of the church, torture of heretics, and all unbaptized babies suffering in hell. A simple conclusion, that non-Calvinists and some Calvinists agree to also, is that being a Calvinist is not essential to having solid Christian teaching.

What Makes a Non-Calvinistic Teaching? This paper considers a writer a confirmed non-Calvinist if he believes one or more points on this list.

1) Jesus suffered and died for all people 2) God expressly willed evil as well as good 3) The root of sin is our free-will, not God’s Sovereign will 4) Predestination is simply based on foreknowledge 5) People have free-will, or free-choice, to respond to God 6) Scripture gives high regard to our free choice as free agents 7) No one is responsible for what he has no ability to affect 8) Christ died for all equally, and God loves all equally One can summarize most of the following writings with the words of J.N.D. Kelly Early Christian Doctrines p.349

“From this beatitude our first parents fell not (these [early Greek] writers all emphasize the point) through any necessity, and still less through any action of God’s but by the misuse of their own free will, and to that fatal lapse of theirs are to be attributed all the evils to which man is heir. The reader should not jump to false conclusions.

1) Since the church leaders were not Calvinists, it does not follow they were five-point Arminians either. They taught a synergy between God’s sovereignty and man’s free-will.

2) These church leaders are not implied to be infallible.

3) They did not agree among themselves on every point. The Teachings In the Church

Athanasius (~297-373 A.D.) “For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father” Incarnation of the Word chapter 7 (Nicene & Post-Nicene

Fathers 2nd Series vol.4 p.40, See also Against the Heathen 4 p.6)

Athanasius: "Now certain Greeks ... make a double mistake: either in denying the Creator to be maker of all things, if evil had an independent subsistence and being of its own; or again, if they mean that He is maker of all things, they will of necessity admit Him to be maker of evil also. For evil, according to them, is included among existing things. ... they also wrongly think that evil has a substantive existence." (Against the Heathen 6 p.6-7)

Basil (329/330-379 A.D.) Prolegomena "On the other hand, of the evils of hell the cause is not God, but ourselves. The origin and root of sin is what is in our own control and our free will." (Prolegomena in the Nicene & Post-Nicene Church Fathers Second Series vol. 8 p.lviii)

Gregory Nazianzus (~330-391 A.D.) "Having honoured him [Adam] with the gift of Free Will (in order that God might belong to him as the result of his choice, no less than to Him who had implanted the seeds of it), ... (On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ. Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series vol.7 p.348

Gregory Nazianzus "...those detractors of all that is praiseworthy, those darkeners of light, uncultured in respect of wisdom, for whom Christ died in vain" (ibid p.349).

Gregory of Nyssa (331/335/336-395 A.D.) "Being the image and the likeness, as has been said, of the Power which rules all things, man [Adam] kept also in the matter of a Free-Will this likeness to Him who Will is over all.... and so he was a free agent, though circumvented with cunning, when he drew upon himself that disaster which now overwhelms humanity. ... for God did not make death. Man became, in fact himself the fabricator, to a certain extent, and the craftsman of evil. All who have the faculty of sight may enjoy equally the sunlight; and any one can if he likes put this enjoyment from him by shutting his eyes: in that case it is not that the sun retires and produces that darkness, but the man himself puts a barrier between his eye and the sunshine; ... Again, a man in building a house for himself may omit to make in it any way of entrance for the light; the will necessarily be in darkness, though he cuts himself off from the light voluntarily." (Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series vol.5 On Virginité chapter 11 p.357) (See also On the Soul and the Resurrection p.457)

John of Damascus "for it would not be right to ascribe to God actions that are sometimes base and unjust; nor may we ascribe these to necessity, ... We are left then with this fact, that the man who acts and makes is himself the author of his own works, and is a creature endowed with free-will. Exposition of the Orthodox Faith chapter 25 Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers 2nd Series vol.9 2nd p.40) We hold, therefore, that free-will comes on the scene at the same moment as reason," (ibid ch27 p.40)

John of Damascus "For chance is defined as the meeting and concurrence of two causes, originating in choice but bringing to pass something other than what is natural; for example, if a man finds a treasure while digging a ditch..." p.39

Cyril of Jerusalem (~315-335-386) "Cleanse thy vessel, that thou mayest receive grace more abundantly. For though remission of sins is given equally to all, the communion of the Holy Ghost is bestowed in proportion to each man's faith" (First Catechetical Lecture I Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers p.7)

Jerome (345-420 A.D.) (He wrote in a question and answer style between the orthodox Atticus and the Pelagian heretic Critobulus)

“Critobulus: “but what grieves me is this: that dignitaries of the Church, and those who usurp the title of master, destroy free will; and once that is destroyed, the way is open for the Manichaeans.”

Atticus: Am I the destroyer of free will because, throughout the discussion, my single aim has been to maintain the omnipotence of God as well as free will?

Critobulus: How can you have free will, and yet say that man can do nothing without God’s assistance?

Atticus: If he is to be blamed who couples free will and God’s help, it follows that we ought to praise who does away with God’s help [sarcasm here]” Against the Pelagians Book III p.474

Hilary of Poitiers (300-367 A.D.) “Had this [will] been given, faith would carry with it no reward, for a necessity of will attached to us would also impose faith upon us.” (On the Trinity viii 12 p.140-141.) See also On the Trinity vii 19 for the definition of free will and the free will of God.)

Theodoret (~393-423-458 A.D. accused of being a Nestorian but vindicated at Chalcedon) Dialogues III in the Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers 2nd Series vol.3 p.224 When the head of the race [Adam] was doomed, all the race was doomed with him, and so when the Saviour destroyed the curse, human nature won freedom”

Patrick of Ireland (~389-461 A.D. on losing salvation) “They are heading towards Hell; they cannot any longer be called Christians nor Romans [i.e. civilized] but outcasts. They must show signs of genuine and bitter repentance and try to make amends for their terrible crime.” Patrick’s Letter to Corticus, a slave-trader.

John Chrysostom (345-martyred 407) on Romans 9:11-13 “What was the cause then why one [Jacob] was loved and the other [Esau] hated? Why was it that one served, the other was served? It was because one was wicked, and the other good. ... For when they were not as yet born, God said, ‘the elder shall serve the younger.’ With what intent then did God say this? Because He doth not wait, as man doth, to see from the issue of the acts the good and him who is not so, but even before these He knoweth which is the wicked and which not as such.” Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers First Series vol.11 p.464-465.)

John Chrysostom on Romans 9:20-21 ““Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter (Read Jeremiah 19:1-10) power, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?’ Here it is not to do away with free-will that he says this, but to show, up to what point we ought to obey God. For in respect of calling God to account, we ought to be as little disposed to it as the clay is.” (ibid p.467)

John Chrysostom “do not suppose that this is said by Paul as an account of the creation, nor as implying a necessity over the will, but to illustrate the sovereignty and difference of dispensations; for it we do not take it in this way, divers incongruities will follow, for if here he were speaking about the will, and those who are good and those not so, He will be Himself the Maker of these, and man will be free from all responsibility. And at this rate, Paul will also be shown to be at variance with himself, as he always bestows chief honor upon free choice. “ (ibid p.468)

John Chrysostom on Ephesians 1:11 "...he [Paul] speaks also of inheritance by lot, yet so as not to divest them of free will.... It is as though he had said, lots were cast, and He hath chosen us' but the whole is of deliberate choice. Men predestinated, that is to say, having chosen them to Himself, he hath separated. ... For marvellous is the foreknowledge of God, and acquainted with all things before their beginning.... According to the purpose,' he says, 'of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will.' That is to say, He had no after working; having modeled all things from the very first, thus he leads forward all things 'according to the counsel of His will. So that it was not merely because the Jews did not listen that He called the Gentiles, nor was it of mere necessity, nor was it on any inducement arising from them."

John Chrysostom on 2 Timothy 2:4 "Imitate God! If He willeth that all men should be saved, there is reason why one should pray for all, if He hath willed that all should be saved, be thou willing also" Homilies on Timothy in Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers 1st Series vol.13 p.430) Authors Who Were Silent on Calvinism

Ambrose of Milan (340-397 A.D.), Aphrahat (4th century), Ephraim the Syrian (~306-378 A.D.), Eusebius of Caesarea (~260-339/340 A.D.), Martin of Tours (-371-396 A.D.), Pope Leo the Great (390/400-440/461 A.D.), and Pope Gregory the Great, Rufinus (~344-408 A.D.), Salaminus Hermias Sozomen (370/380--425 A.D.), Socrates Scholasticus (~379--439 A.D.), Sulpitius Severus (363-420 A.D.).

Conclusion

Novel additions to Christian doctrine, such as papal succession, venerating images, traducianism, etc. all preceded Calvinism. Both this and the preceding paper show that up to the time of Augustine, we find no trace that Calvinism existed in the early church. While quoting fallible men does not prove Calvinism false, the fact that we find no early Christian Calvinists deflates the claim that Calvinism is found throughout the Bible. Appeals to Greek grammar sound hollow to support doctrines that were alien to all New Testament Greek speaking Christians.

03 - Augustine - Calvinistic but Denied Calvinism

Augustine - Calvinistic but Denied Calvinism

“But it is worth while to expound the whole of that passage of the apostle more fully, ‘O Timothy, keep the deposit, avoiding profane novelties of words.’” Vincent of Lérins (~434 A.D.) , A Commentary chapter 22.

Vincent wrote of many great men of the church, but he was silent on Augustine. (Semi-Pelagian)

After this time, the first two authors who said “Calvinistic things” were Ambrose and Augustine. Ambrose (381) said one thing (Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers 10:126) that is arguably Calvinistic: “That the nature of everything is of His will, and He is the Author of all things which have come into being.” (Of the Holy Spirit 2:91). However, Athenagoras said almost the same thing, and He defended free will in the same work, so this does not prove Ambrose was a Calvinist. Ambrose also taught that baptism opens the kingdom of heaven to infants in On Abraham 2:79. Most Calvinists would not say that infants going to heaven is caused by, or contingent on, water baptism. Augustine taught some points that Calvinists use, but he also taught things Calvinists would deny (5:109,317-319,378).

Augustine said he knew nothing of Hebrew in a letter to Memorius. He relied on the Septuagint or the Latin. In Confessions he wrote of his early dislike for Greek, which prevented him from developing overmuch in it. (Forster & Marston p.267)

“SUMMARY OF THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF ELECTION ... 15. All of those dying in infancy are among the elect.” Boettner p.148,149)

Other Calvinists who agreed with this include Charles Hodge, W.G.T. Shedd, B.B. Warfield, and C.H. Spurgeon. Indeed, I have not read of any Calvinists who were not at least optimistic that all infants, dying in infancy, are saved.

Augustine On the Spirit and the Letter, written in 412 A.D.

“Consequently a man cannot be said to have even that will with which he believes in God, without having received it; since this rises at the call of God out of the free will which he received naturally when he was created. God no doubt wishes all men to be saved and to come into the knowledge of the truth; but yet not so as to take away from them free will, for the good or the evil use of which they may be most righteously judged. ...nevertheless they do not therefore overcome His will, but rob their own selves of the great, nay the very greatest, good, and implicate themselves in penalties of punishment... Thus God’s will is for ever invincible; but it would be vanquished, unless it devised what to do with such as despised it, or if these despises could in any way escape from the retribution which He has appointed for such as they.” (Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers First Series vol.5 Anti-Pelagian Writings p.109) In Augustine’s Retractations, he mentions this work, but does not retract any of this.

Based on God respecting man's free will, and the fact that Augustine's definition of God's irresistible will is very different from a Calvinist's one cannot say Augustine was a Calvinist. One could still say that Augustine had Calvinistic tendencies, though.

Calvinists can have a simple answer for this and the preceding tract: the early church did preach Calvinism, because the early church read the Bible and it is in the Bible. There are two answers for this: the Bible never explicitly denies free will, affirms fatalism, or talks of people Jesus did not die for using those words. As for the Bible's teaching leading to those conclusions, we should look at what the believers who were native speakers of New Testament Greek said concerning the verses Calvinists often quote. This we will do in the next tract.

Augustine did not read or write Greek. Was Augustine a "true Calvinist" before Calvin was even born? Did Augustine say a lot of inconsistent teaching on this subject. After studying Augustine, I have come to the conclusion that neither of the previous hypotheses is true. Though I frankly disagree with Augustine on many matters, I was surprised that I basically agreed with him on this issue. Augustine believed in total depravity, defined differently from Calvinists. Augustine believed in irresistible will, defined very differently from Calvinists. However, in my opinion, Augustine was all messed up in teaching as Christian doctrine, that unbaptized infants automatically go to hell, while the act of baptism makes them go to heaven. *The Greatness of Augustine Reconsidered*

Forster and Marston write (p.286) Through the influence and advocacy of Augustine thousands of simple brethren of Christ were actually caused to be hungry exiled strangers, homeless, in prison or in pain. How then may we reconcile the words of Jesus with Renwick's description of Augustine as 'the greatest Christian of his age'? How may we understand Souter's description of him as 'the greatest Christian since New Testament times'? ... On what are we to base our standards of greatness? Can Augustine be excused on the grounds that 'he was only a child of his times'?"

(They go on to discuss Tertullian, Lactantius, Athanasius, Martin of Tours, Ambrose, and Chrysostom's stated positions against using force on heretics. After discussing Calvin and Augustine's teaching the torture and killing of heretics, they say "It becomes still less convincing when we are told, often by the same apologists, that those like Calvin and Augustine were the most competent Bible scholars in history. ... Surely if Augustine had the greatness of mind and strength of character to overturn all the Christian teaching of the first 300 years, it is absurd to excuse his advocacy of persecution on the grounds of a spirit in him of conformity. The tragic fact is surely that those who deny any power but God's and hence reduce everyone including Satan to servants of God may (if times are ripe) finish by using Satan's own weapons of fear, force, pain, and persecution. Although Augustine initially adopted persecution because of its practical success (and it was indeed practically successful), he himself directly linked it with his theological system.

We have, in summary, to recognize the effect of Augustine's teaching on our thinking even today. Yet we must decide whether his teachings are truly a 'restoration;' of the Apostle Paul...

We must decide for ourselves whether we believe that Augustine, or the Christians of the first three centuries, had the true Pauline doctrine. Our decision on this issue is going to affect our whole attitude to God and his conflict with evil." Forster, R.T. and V. Paul Marston *God's Strategy in Human History* Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1973. (p.286-287)

04 - Prosper of Aquitaine : No Calvinist

Prosper of Aquitaine : No Calvinist

Introduction

Prosper of Aquitaine was a church historian, theologian, supporter of Augustine, and contender against Semi-Pelagianism. He originally wrote against the Semi-Pelagian views of Rufinus. He wrote to Augustine asking for supporting arguments and Augustine replied to him. Prosper wrote an answer to what he perceived as Semi-Pelagian attacks in Answers to the Gauls. and Answers to Vincentian Articles, where he responded to teaching of another Semi-Pelagian, Vincent of Lerins. The quotes are all from Answers to the Gauls.

Prosper shared with Augustine some peculiar views. Everyone's guilt for Adam's sin was removed by water baptism.

Summary of Prosper's Answer to the Gauls In Answer to the Gauls Prosper wrote 15 articles and 15 qualifications (or summaries, of the articles. Here is a brief synopsis.

1. No fatal necessity: God's predestination is not in any way the cause of sin.
- 2-3. Water baptism takes away original and previous personal sins of both the elect and reprobate.
4. All elect and reprobate who hear the Gospel are called to grace. Those who never heard were not called.
5. There is only one call, common to both elect and reprobate. A man's faith is both a gift of God and his free will, but unbelief is solely from his will.
6. We have a free will in the shadow of death. God's grace does not suppress free will but strengthens it.
7. Some genuine believers not predestinated as the elect because God foreknew they would fall away.
8. Christ paid the price for the entire world. God's call is not universal and equal for all, but He wants all to be saved.
9. It is right to say the Savior died for the entire world, but it also may be said it was only for those who would benefit.
10. The reason all do not hear the gospel is a secret of God's.
11. God hardens some because they first deserved this by their previous sins.
12. God foreknows and wills good, but only foreknows evil. God preserves believers in Him, but some turn away by their own fault.

13. Even the reprobate have a role on this earth and in God's plan.

14. God foreknew but did not cause our disbelief. Faith and righteousness are gifts of God.

15. Foreknowledge and predestination are not the same, for that would make God the author of evil.

Quotes from Prosper's Answer to the Gauls from Article 6: "It is wrong to say that free will is nothing or does not exist; but it is also wrong to deny that, before it is illumined by the light of faith, it moves about in darkness and in the shadow of death. Before man is freed from the slavery of the devil by the grace of God, he lies in the depth of the abyss in which he threw himself headlong through his own free will." from Article 6 "When, then, a man is justified, that is, from sinner made into a just man, he receives, without any previous merit of his own, a gift by which he is able to gain merits. And the goodness which the grace of God started in him must grow by his own free co-operation, though never without God's help, without which man can neither advance nor persevere in virtue." from Article 6: "But it is altogether silly to say that the predestination of God is operative in men both for good and for evil. This seems to imply that some sort of necessity drives men to both good and evil, when actually in good men their willingness comes from grace, while in the wicked their wills act without grace." from Article 9: "... Accordingly, though it is right to say that the Saviour was crucified for the redemption of the entire world, because He truly took our human nature and because all men were lost in the first man, yet it may also be said that He was crucified only for those who were to profit by His death...."

Article 15 Answer: "If you make no distinction whatever between God's prescience [foreknowledge] and His predestination, then you endeavor to attribute to God with regard to evil what must be ascribed to him with regard to what is good.... And so prescience can exist without predestination, but predestination cannot exist without prescience." (p.156)

Qualification of Article 2: "Likewise, he who says that in those who are not predestined the grace of baptism does not wipe away original sin is not a Catholic. The sacrament of baptism, which takes away all sins without exception, is a true baptism also in those who are not to persevere in the truth and who for that reason were not predestined for eternal life." (p.157)

Qualification of Article 5: "...A man's faith, it is true, is both a gift of God and a fruit of his free will, but unbelief comes solely from the will of man." (p.158)

Qualification of Article 6: "Likewise, he who says that free will is nothing in man but that it is the predestination of God which is operative in all men whether for good or for evil, is not a Catholic [i.e. of Orthodox faith]...." (p.158)

Qualification of Article 7: "...It is because God foresaw that they would do so through their own fault that He did not include them among the elect that were predestined...." (p.158-159)

Qualification of Article 9: "...For it is certain that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is the price for the redemption of the entire world. But they do not share in the application of this price who either cherishing their captivity refused to be liberated or having been liberated returned to their captivity...." (p.159)

Qualification of Article 15: Likewise, he who says that prescience [foreknowledge] and predestination are one and the same thing may certainly unite the two with regard to our good works. ... But with regard to evil works, we must refer these solely to God's prescience." (p.162)
Ways in Which Prosper was Calvinistic T - Total Depravity

Prosper said that we had free will, but it moves about in darkness and in the shadow of death. We are slaves and in the abyss which he threw himself headlong through his own free will.

L- Limited (or Definitive) Atonement

Prosper accepted aspects of limited (or definitive) atonement, as well as accepting aspects of universal atonement (Article 9).

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