

A Question for My Beloved Calvinists

by David Servant

David Servant challenges Calvinist beliefs by emphasizing the importance of human free will and God's universal love in the salvation process.

Scripture: John 3:17, John 6:44, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 2:3, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Calvinism Debate", "Salvation Theology"

Description

David Servant addresses the theological differences between Calvinism and non-Calvinism, highlighting the key points of contention such as predestination, irresistible grace, limited atonement, and eternal security. He emphasizes the importance of understanding God's drawing of individuals and the role of human response in salvation, challenging Calvinists to reconsider their beliefs in light of biblical truths. David expresses love and respect for Calvinists while presenting a thought-provoking argument against the doctrines of Calvinism, urging believers to prioritize God's universal love and mercy for all sinners.

Transcript

Those who have been reading with me through the New Testament chronologically---by means of our daily emailed devotional that we call HeavenWord Daily---know that I am not a Calvinist. In fact, practically every time we happen upon one of the many passages of Scripture that contradict the doctrines of Calvinism, I point it out. Consequently, I've pointed out scores of scriptures that illustrate where Calvinism deviates from biblical truth.

For readers who may not know what Calvinism is, let me briefly explain. Calvinists believe that, in eternity past, God sovereignly selected some people to be saved, and thus He also sovereignly selected everyone else to be damned. At a pre-determined point during the lifetimes of those who are allegedly pre-selected for salvation, God draws them irresistibly, and they are born again. Calvinists also believe, and understandably so, that Jesus did not die for the sins of everyone. Rather, He only died for those whom He allegedly predestined for salvation. Finally, because Calvinists believe that salvation does not depend on any person's free will and only upon the sovereign decree and action of God, they also believe that no genuinely-saved person could possibly ever become unsaved. Once genuinely saved, people are guaranteed to be saved in the end, which is probably the most attractive element of Calvinism, and which may explain why some people readily embrace it. Once a person is convinced that he has been sovereignly pre-selected for salvation, he knows he has salvation "in the bag."

I would like to offer some food for thought for Calvinists, ending with a challenge, and at the same time fortify non-Calvinists from being persuaded by some common Calvinist arguments. First, however, let me express my love for Calvinists who are following Christ. I know some very, very fine Christians who are Calvinists. In fact, I've lately found myself debating, via email, some Christian friends of the highest caliber who have recently embraced Calvinism. I believe that it is love that is motivating me, otherwise, I wouldn't spend my time debating them, as I do have plenty of other things to do. It really doesn't make any difference to me personally what they (or you) believe. I'm just hoping to persuade them to abandon part of their theology.

The God Who Draws

Calvinists believe that unregenerate people are so depraved that, left to themselves, they would never repent, believe and follow Jesus. And they are absolutely correct on that point. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Contrary to what some Calvinist theologians try to tell us, however, the word "draw" doesn't actually mean "drag" in the Greek language, and a Greek lexicon will reveal that. And if God "draws" people, that clearly indicates that people have a say in the matter of whether or not they will yield to His drawing. Thus, Christ not only affirmed that our salvation requires the work of God's grace from the very start---due to our depravity and our consequent need for God's drawing---but He also affirmed that each person will use his or her God-given ability to either resist or not resist God's gracious drawing.

Of course, as I've already stated, Calvinists believe that God draws only those whom He has allegedly predestined, and that He draws them so strongly that they can't resist. He supposedly draws them "irresistibly." Non-Calvinists, on the other hand, believe that God could draw people irresistibly, but that He doesn't. If He did, those who are irresistibly drawn, having no choice in the matter, would be virtual robots, and it could hardly be said that they love God, as love is predicated on free choice. One wonders what God would desire or gain with a group of robots. Try recording your own voice on your answering machine saying, "I love you, I love you, I love you!" Then call your phone number and see how much your recorded message warms your heart. That is surely how God would feel with a group of irresistibly-drawn robots. It could hardly be said that they have a relationship with Him.

Non-Calvinists see the Bible as a book about people who resist God's drawing. The Old Testament, in particular, is a story of people who resisted Him, and most of them, as descendants of Israel, were specially chosen by Him. They were chosen by Him yet they resisted Him. And when God sent His Son into the world "that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17, as so declared the Son) the majority whom He came to save rejected Him. And regarding the specially-chosen ones, the descendants of Israel, Scripture laments, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Even the spiritual leaders and Bible students among those specially-chosen people, for the most part, resisted Him. Luke writes that "the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John" (Luke 7:30). So people whom God draws, whom He wants to save, resist Him, and forfeit what could have been theirs.

Calvinists sometimes point out special people in the Bible, like the apostle Paul, who certainly had a strong drawing from God the day he came to Christ. But because Paul was struck down on the road to Damascus by a blinding light, does that prove his own will had no part to play in his salvation? Could he have ignored his experience and continued with his plan to persecute Christians? Of course he could have. And was there no possibility that Paul, who certainly believed (and perhaps wrote) that everyone

who hopes to see the Lord must "pursue the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 13:5), might not have pursued that holiness and thus not seen the Lord? Or was he a holy robot, guaranteed salvation no matter what he did? Do his words, "But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27), indicate that Paul believed he had salvation "in the bag" since he was "irresistibly" drawn? Obviously not.

May I also point out that God's very strong drawing of Paul is not typical, and so it can't rightly serve as a typical example of how God generally deals with people. Moreover, God's strong drawing of Paul was a manifestation of God's drawing of you, me, and everyone else who ever heard Paul's words quoted in the gospel. God didn't strongly draw Paul just for Paul's sake, but to draw you as well! Moreover, Paul believed he was specially singled out by God because he was the foremost sinner, so that "Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16). That is, God wanted every sinner to have hope because of His great mercy towards Paul. Thus Paul's special drawing does not buttress the idea of God's alleged pre-selection of a few; rather, it affirms God's universal love and mercy offered to every sinner.

"But how can a impotent man resist the omnipotent God?" Calvinists ask. Obviously little people can resist a big God if He permits them to resist Him. I was once pinned to the floor by my four-year-old son as we "wrestled." And are we to think that God has no control over His drawing power, and that He only has one power setting---"full power"? A God who can't control His power is not all-powerful.

Grace Redefined

One of the most common arguments that Calvinists use revolves around a unique definition of grace. "If people are saved 'by grace alone,'" they say, "then people cannot play any part in their salvation. Salvation must be 100% the work of God if it is truly salvation by grace." Calvinists have even labeled their distinctive doctrines as "the doctrines of grace," as if no one else holds to a theology of grace. That label is somewhat insulting to those of us who believe that salvation is by grace alone yet who do not subscribe to the doctrines of Calvinism. Calvinism's distinctive doctrines could be better called "the doctrines of damnation," because they promise damnation to the majority of people. God offers no grace and no hope of salvation for them, as they are doomed from before they were born to an eternal hell.

Calvinists believe that God could have saved everyone just as easily as He saved those whom He allegedly predestined for salvation, but He was pleased to save only a small minority of those whom He created in His image. The rest He was pleased to foreordain to hell. We cannot help but ask, "If God is love, what kind of love is that?" John Wesley, founder of the Methodists, answered, "That is the kind of 'love' that makes one's blood run cold."

Does salvation by grace require that human beings play no part in their salvation? Imagine if I were bankrupt, but someone paid my debts and gave me a fresh start by means of a million-dollar check and some great business advice. Would you say that my financial recovery was not "by grace alone" because I had to deposit the million-dollar check into my bank account in order to enjoy the benefit of my benefactor's kindness? Of course not. So if such logic would be considered absurd by anyone and everyone, why is the same logic, when applied to salvation, swallowed by Calvinists? Why do Calvinists accuse non-Calvinists of not having a gospel of grace simply because we maintain that those who are saved are those who, as the Bible teaches, don't resist God's gracious drawing? If you accept a birthday gift, is that a "work" that lessens the grace of the giver?

Calvinist logic that sets grace against human response is not a logic that can be supported by any scripture. There are no verses in the Bible that tell us that if salvation is of grace, then human free will plays no part in the salvation process. Rather, the Bible affirms that salvation is all of grace and also affirms that those who are saved are those who, by their own wills, do not resist God's gracious drawing. Calvinists elevate human reasoning above Scripture's revelation, making God's grace and human responsibility mutually exclusive concepts, while the Bible makes them mutually inclusive.

Applying the same kind of human logic, we could claim that, because salvation is by grace alone and human responsibility plays no part, Christians can sin all they want without eternal consequences. Yet the same Bible that affirms salvation is by grace also affirms that the unrighteous, including fornicators, adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards and swindlers "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Does your will have anything to do with your not committing adultery or stealing? If your answer is "yes," then you have just admitted that your will plays a part in whether or not you will inherit eternal life.

Salvation is by grace from beginning to end. God graciously draws everyone in the world by means of His creation and their God-given consciences. He awes them and convicts them. He expects every person whom He so draws to seek Him (Acts 7:26-27). Those who do seek Him do so only because of His gracious initiative. And Jesus promised that those who seek will find (Matt. 7:7-8). Scripture affirms that God "is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). If people are incapable of seeking God, as some claim, then we would have to wonder why the Bible says otherwise.

God also draws most people on planet earth by means of calamities, as they suffer His temporal wrath, which is a loving warning of His eternal wrath. Some God draws through dreams and visions, and He draws everyone who hears the gospel through the gospel. You can be certain that the God who so loved the world that He gave His only Son will do whatever it takes to get the gospel to anyone who responds to His drawing through creation, conscience or calamities. He is not limited.

A Question and a Challenge

There is much more that can be said on this subject, and I have written much more here. But let me close with a question and a challenge to any Calvinist or those considering Calvinism.

God has revealed Himself in Scripture through Jesus Christ as a God of love who offers salvation to "whosoever will" (John 3:16). Yet Calvinism has created a God who could very easily save all, but who is pleased to save only a few, and He is thus pleased to eternally damn billions of people whom He could have easily saved. Dear Calvinist, are you pleased, as God supposedly is, that the majority of people are divinely foreordained to go to hell forever, having been given no opportunity for saving mercy from Him? If you are not pleased about that, then you are not pleased about something that pleases your God, and that makes you a rebel against Him. It also makes you His judge.

On the other hand, if you are pleased that God is pleased to eternally damn hundreds of millions of people whom He could have easily saved, then you are a very sick person, and everyone would agree with that, including yourself. So why are you not repulsed by something allegedly within God's character that would repulse you if it characterized yourself, or anyone else? That is my question.

If people are "unconditionally elected," that means God has not chosen your children or your grandchildren for salvation by virtue of the fact that He has chosen you for salvation, otherwise their election would be

conditional, not unconditional. If you are a Calvinist, you must face up to the fact that there is a very good possibility that God has chosen your children and/or grandchildren for eternal damnation. Your God may be pleased to offer your children no opportunity for mercy or salvation. They may be unchangeably predestined for hell regardless of anything that you do.

So here is my challenge: When your children or grandchildren are old enough to be taught about God, I challenge you and your spouse to tell them the terrible truths of Calvinism and then watch their spiritual progress over the ensuing years. Tell them what you believe about God:

Little Johnny, God has predestined the minority of people to be saved and go to heaven forever, and He has predestined the majority of people to be eternally damned and burn in the fires of hell. We have no idea, little Johnny, if God has predestined you to be forever damned or forever saved. We love you, little Johnny, but we accept the fact that God might not love you, and that He may have plans to send you to hell for your future sins. If you do find yourself one day burning in hell because He hasn't elected to save you, just remember that we will always love you, even if God hates you. Take comfort knowing that we are not like God.

We will be in heaven forever only because we were unconditionally chosen for salvation before we were born. That would be the only reason that we won't be in hell with you if you find yourself there. It won't be because of anything we did. So also take comfort in knowing that. It may not seem fair, but who are we to judge God? So again, if you find yourself in hell, remember that we will always love you as we forever worship the God who loved us but who hated you, the God who sent His Son to die for us but not for you. Please, we ask, don't let it bother you---if you find yourself in hell---that we love the God who hated you and showed you no mercy. We must accept the fact that God is sovereign, and He does what He pleases.

My dear beloved Calvinist, will you teach that to your children or grandchildren? I suspect that your answer will be "never." But why not? Why would you ever hide the wonderful "doctrines of grace," the "Bible truth," from your own children or grandchildren?

And would you be angry with me if I told your children or grandchildren what you believe to be false? Would you be upset with me if I told them that Jesus undoubtedly died for them, undoubtedly loves them, is undoubtedly drawing them, and will undoubtedly forgive and cleanse them if they yield to His drawing, at which time He would grant them the gifts of repentance and faith? If not, then why are you a Calvinist?

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all (Rom. 11:32).

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers (1 Tim. 4:10).

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

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