

# Calvinism: The Wellspring of Unconditional Love

*We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19*

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## Introduction

- **2 Peter 1:1-15**-Living in the age of information, where the relevancy of the latest news is sought by the means of the latest sound bite, we are prone to allow sermons to drift away like yesterdays news into the abyss of irrelevancy. When faced with a “reminder” sermon, our temptation will be to think we already have heard this “information,” to think that we already “know” this, checking out mentally as we categorize this subject as something we learned long ago. For we have two options regarding the cornerstone of all reformational thought: Either place this as information on the shelving of your mind and allow it to collect dust, or allow it to daily wash over your soul in order that you, like Paul, might be filled with the wonder and awe of God’s electing love that wells up with doxological praise (see the end of Romans 8, 11, and Ephesians chapter 3).
- The truths of Calvinism are not mere doctrinal postulations, but instead great and precious promises that reveal the height, depth, and breadth of God’s love for you in Jesus Christ. To the degree we engage and interact our finite minds with the infinite mind of God, is the extent to which we will be overwhelmed with His love for us, causing us to respond with love for Him and then to our neighbor. And so, I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things. For these truths from God’s revealed Word are revelations of life and love. They are the expressions and manifestations of the God of love, who freely did what He was not required to do.

## History

- Go to the bookstore, but you will not find any book titled *My Five Points*, by John Calvin. Long after Calvin’s death in 1564, a man by the name of Jacobus Arminius developed a system of thought that ran counter to the teachings of Calvin, Luther, Beza, etc. Upon his death in 1609, his followers systematized his teachings into five articles called the Arminian Articles of Remonstrance. This created quite a ruckus, so in 1618, the Synod of Dort was convened in Holland to address these articles. After seven months of study, the Synod developed a response to the five points of the remonstrants. This would later be known as the Canon of Dort, and eventually The Five Points of Calvinism, conveniently engrained in our minds with the acronym T-U-L-I-P.

## Central Doctrines of the Reformation

- **Total Depravity (or Total Inability)**-When Adam sinned, we died. His sin was imputed to man covenantally. As our head, Adam perfectly represented us. We are apostates from the womb, our sinful nature enslaving us to sin. The corruption of our spiritual nature is total in extent, not degree. No action is as good as it can be, and therefore nothing we do can ever appear meritorious in God’s eyes. (Ps 51:5; Rom 3:10,11; Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:13)
- The issue is not that of “will,” but of “ability.” Man, due to the Fall, is enslaved by the nature he was born with and freely chooses from that basis. To be sure, man freely chooses as he pleases in light of the inclinations he feels, wants, and desires. However, fallen man is spiritually blind, uniformly preferring and choosing evil. Thus, spontaneity and enslavement exist together. Man is spiritually dead, unable to choose that which is unnatural to him. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? (Matt 7:18; 8:43; John 6:44,65; 8:34; 12:39,40; Rom 8:7,8; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Tim 2:25,26)
- **Unconditional Election**-Unconditional election is embedded throughout the Bible. Abram, Israel, Canaan, Jeremiah, Paul, etc. It is God who chooses man, not man who chooses God. God is the One who possesses free will. The primary cause of salvation rests with God, with man’s choice being the secondary cause that is wholly conditional on the primary cause: God’s choice. It was God’s eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any merit in man himself, separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life (non-justice/mercy) and the other to everlasting death (justice). There is no injustice in this perfect and holy divine decree. (Ps 3:8; John 1:12,13; 5:21; Rom 9; Eph 1; 2 Tim 1:8,9; Heb 12:2)
- **Limited Atonement (or Particular Redemption)**-All positions (except actual universalism) limit the atonement. Hypothetical universalism limits the power/efficacy of the cross, while the Reformed position limits the extent. We must choose between an atonement of high value or wide extension. The two cannot go together. Christ died for the Church, He secured the salvation for His sheep, He purchased the Church of God with His own blood. If the atonement merely made it possible for man to be saved, then man must add something to the cross (repentance and faith) in order to be saved. However, the cross was sufficient, and was complete in securing the salvation of the elect. (Is 53:11; Matt 20:28; 26:28; John 10:14,15; Acts 20:28; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor

- **Irresistible Grace (or Efficacious Grace)**-There are two callings: One outward (Matt 22:14) and one inward (Rom 8:30). The outward calling is the external hearing of the gospel: Apart from the inward calling, the outward calling will always be resisted by unregenerate man. The second calling always accomplishes God's desired effect, that of justification. This is the grace of regeneration. Regeneration is something done in us, and not an act performed by us. In regeneration, God bestows to us the gifts of repentance and faith, and creates in us a desire for Himself. Thus, upon regeneration, we choose the object of our desire: We choose Christ. Where once we were unable, now we are able. Where once we wouldn't, now we will. (Ezekiel 11:19; Acts 16:14; Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 1:23,24; 2 Thess 2:13,14; 1 Peter 2:9; 5:10)
- **Perseverance Of The Saints (or The Preservation Of The Saints)**-Our eternal security rests in the faithfulness of God and not our own faithfulness. We persevere because He preserves us. Christ not only is the author of our faith, but He is also the finisher. Salvation is not a possession of ours that we can lose or misplace. On the contrary, we are His possession, and are told that nothing can be snatched from His hands. Our confidence is founded completely in the sovereign work of our Triune God: The Father elected us, the Son purchased us, and the Spirit raised us from the dead. (John 6:39; 10:28; Rom 8:30, 38,39; 11:29; Eph 1:13,14; Phil 1:6; 1 Thess 5:23,24; Heb 10:14; 12:2; 1 John 5:13)

### How Then Shall We Live?

- Out there in the Christian community and beyond into the world, and looking back over the past 500 years, what is the reputation of Calvinistic churches? Are we known for our initiatory, broad, unconditional love that reveals to the watching world that we are His disciples? Or are we known for our factions, smug pride, and stagnate churches? "I love you if..." I love you but..." Preaching against the ditch we aren't in (the compromising reception by the church of all moral behaviors), our ditch is that we become so narrow and inbred that we begin killing our own. Focused on our methods, myopic in our doctrinal precision (Is it supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism?), quickly offended by the sin we discover in the community we desired, the association of Calvinists and Christ-like unconditional love is rare. While Christ spoke the hard words to the hypocritical religious leaders of His day, He looked out upon the multitude, beyond His inner circle of twelve, and the Bible says He was moved with compassion (Matt 9:36). Can the same be said of us?
- **Colossians 3:12-14**-We are the elect of God. As the elect of God, the trademark of our love for others ought to bear the marks of God's love for us: Tender mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, and love. Do you have a complaint? Then what does the Word command you to do? And as you reflect upon your duty to bear with one another, consider the electing love of God that pursued you when you were an enemy, dead in your sins. And since your conversion, consider the patience and longsuffering of God who has borne with your many sins and struggles over the years. Our insight and discernment into the frailties of others ought to lead us to taking the relational long view, using that discernment not to divide, but to bear with one another with the same initiatory, relentless, sanctifying love God has had towards us; measured not in weeks and months, but years and decades, and maybe even a lifetime.
- So reflect and meditate upon the truths of God's electing love. These truths are the pathways to doxological praise, wonder, and awe of God's glorious plan of redemption found in the Lord Jesus Christ. To the degree that we are consumed vertically with Christ and the Word of God, will be the degree to which we will be characterized as the church of Colossians chapter three.

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19*