

Why Everyone is a Practical Calvinist!

By Rev. Don Jefferson (July 2010)

I. Introduction

This paper is not a classical defense of the five points of Calvinism. Calvinism is much more than simply five points. Calvinism, at the basic level, is a belief in the absolute Sovereignty of God. Benjamin Warfield once wrote about the Calvinist saying,

It lies then, let me repeat, in a profound apprehension of God in His majesty, with the poignant realization which inevitably accompanies this apprehension, of the relation sustained to God by the creature as such, and particularly by the sinful creature. The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in His glory, is filled on the one hand with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners. He who believes in God without reserve and is determined that God shall be God to him in all his thinking, feeling and willing — in the entire compass of his life activities, intellectual, moral and spiritual — throughout all his individual social and religious relations, is, by force of that strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.

Calvinists believe the Bible teaches that man's will is so bound to sin (Total Depravity) he cannot choose Christ unless God chooses whom he will save, (biblically, has chosen before the foundation of the world, Unconditional Election). God sent his son to die for those and those only whom he has chosen (Limited Atonement). Those whom God has chosen cannot resist His call, but will come to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit (Irresistible Grace) and will persevere unto the end (Perseverance of the Saints).

This paper has a more practical purpose. For as much as Calvinism has been misrepresented and attacked throughout the history of the church, the truth is, everyone is a practical Calvinist. Man, we are told in the Bible, is created in the image of God. Yet, as God's creatures, whether we acknowledge Him or not, we all evidence the characteristics of the God who has created us and therefore, we all live as Calvinists even though we may not even have heard of the term.

This paper is not meant to be an intense theological paper with exhaustive Scripture proofs or theological jargon. It simply bears witness to the truth of God's word and exposes why, at the end of the day, every man is a lives as a Calvinist.

II. The Myth of Free Will

All of us make hundreds of decisions every day. Many of them we do not even think about. It would appear that many of those decisions are made of our own free will or volition. I may choose what to wear to work or play. I may choose between two or three dinner choices at the restaurant buffet or menu. I may choose what to do on my day off. I may choose who to marry and how many children to have. The list goes on and on. But are these really free choices? The answer of course is "No!" It may surprise most people to realize the choices we think we have made by our own free will are really not "free" at all. Our choices are always limited by certain factors.

First of all, our choices are limited by circumstances; limited by what clothes I may have in the closet from which to choose; limited by the items on the menu or the food on the buffet or what is in the refrigerator or freezer at dinnertime. My choices of what to do on my day off may be limited by the weather, (which always seem to be the case when I want to go fishing). Perhaps it is my only day to mow the lawn or service the car or sleep in. The availability of resources such as money always hinder our choices. These and a multitude of other circumstances can

and do limit my choices and hinder my "free" decision making.

Secondly, our choices are limited by our likes and dislikes. Unless I was starving and the only thing I had to eat was liver for dinner, I would have to choose to eat it. A situation dictated by circumstances. Otherwise I will choose the fried chicken. Why do I choose some foods on the buffet and pass by others? It is simply because I like some and do not like others. Why would I choose to date or marry one person over another? Either the marriage is arranged (again a situation dictated by circumstances), or there are characteristics of that special person I date or marry which causes me to choose one over another. I receive an offer for a free dinner or lunch in the mail to hear some sales pitch or investment advice. It is a great invitation, but I choose not to go because I am not interested in sitting through the presentation.

Third, our choices may be limited by physical ability. I would have liked to impress the football cheerleaders in high school with my athletic ability, but I wasn't good enough to make the team. A person may suffer a physical handicap due to injury or birth or illness. Even though we may choose to work, a good case of the flu may prevent us from doing so. I would like to fly, but I have no wings.

Finally, our choices are limited by our nature. The very kind of people we are. I cannot choose to have a baby because I am a man and not a woman. I cannot choose God because I am a sinner. In all of these situations, we may appear to be making a "free" choice. But that is simply not the case. It most of the choices we make, while our choices are limited, we will choose to do what is most pleasing or beneficial to ourselves under the circumstances, according to our likes and dislikes, within our physical capabilities, according to our nature.

It should not surprise us then, when we find out, according to the Word of God that our "free choice" for Christ is really not "free" at all. The invitation is certainly free and freely given, (Matthew 11:28-30.)

A true Calvinist (contrary to how Calvinism is often presented) would insist that a person, given a choice, will always do what they want to do. . A person will not do what they don't want to do unless something or someone forces them to act against their will. The Bible is clear that no one wants to choose God. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." . . . the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-12; 17).

One of the charges made against Calvinism is that it makes God unfair because a person may want to be saved, but is not of the "elect." The problem is, no such person actually exists. There is no person in the history of mankind that has ever wanted to come to Christ and yet was denied by God. I may desire a person's salvation. You may desire a person's salvation, but the only reason a person does not choose to come to Christ is that they do not want to come.

But there is more. The Bible declares that all mankind is born in sin because of Adam's transgression. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come." (Romans 5:12-14).

Paul is saying that men are sinners not because they sin. Rather men sin because they are sinners. It is man's nature to sin and when given a choice, a man will choose sin over righteousness because he is a sinner. That is what he is and it is impossible, of his own free will to change. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." (Jeremiah 13:23). So even though I am invited to go to the Opera, given the choice, I will not go. Mankind, even though he is invited to come to Christ, will not choose to

come. The only way I will go the opera is if my wife drags me against my will and the only way a person can come to Christ is if the Father drags them against their will. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44).

Man's "free will" is a myth. It is limited by circumstances, his likes and dislikes, his physical and spiritual inabilities and his own sinful nature. Only God, by the power of His Spirit can change the heart and will of a person to choose Christ.

III. The Discomfort of Chance

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matt 10:29-30).

None of us like to live by chance. We want to be in control of the present and the future. It is a scary thought to wake up in the morning and not know what the day will bring. Will we still have a job? Will my health hold out? Is my marriage secure? Will I graduate? Will my children be successful and find good spouses? Fortune tellers and horoscopes have been part of man's existence since the earliest of times.

When we don't know the answer to these questions, life can worry and trouble us. We may think that our lives will always go on just as they have. We were born, went to school, got a job, perhaps married and we hope that our children's lives will be much the same. Stock market recessions have happened over the years and then bounced back to even higher gains. Wars have come and gone. Many ancient religions and even some modern ones are cyclical and worship the seasons of the year believing what once was will be again.

Yet, if we are honest, we must admit that the control we have over our own lives is very limited. When I was going to seminary I worked at a mortuary part-time, answering

the phone and setting up visitations and funerals. My next door neighbor was a young man and his wife that worked road construction. One warm afternoon this couple chatted with me over the fence about their future and we talked about the Lord. The young man just wasn't interested. They were planning a future and a family and life was good.

The next day I went to work and helped set up the visitation parlor. The next night, when I went to work I was shocked that the visitation was for my young next-door neighbor. A drunk truck driver had run a construction barricade, struck the young man, killing him instantly. We don't expect such things to happen. That is why they call such events "accidents."

How much more comfortable life would be if we knew exactly what tomorrow was going to be like. Movies and plays and books have been written about time machines and prophecies and the future, but they are only fantasies.

How much better, even yet, if we had absolute control over the future. If you and I had the power to not only know the future, but determine it exactly, would any of us miss the opportunity to have life go exactly as we pleased? So we must confess we have the will to be in absolute control and determine the outcome, we just do not have the power to do so. There is someone, however, who has both the will and the power. He is the God of Scripture. The God who says, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Isa 46:10).

So do we deny to God what we desire for ourselves? If we would will to be in absolute control, but only lack the power, why do we deny this will in God who has both the will and the power?

God has willed to save a people to praise and honor and adore and enjoy him for all eternity. Are we to believe that God sent his Son to die a horrible death on the chance that some might believe? If God has the will and the power, would not He, like us, guarantee the outcome for his good

pleasure? And would not we, if we could, do the same? If so, then, no matter what we might say, we are practical Calvinists.

IV. Living Life with No Plan

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isa 45:10)

In the movie, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones is asked, "What is your plan, Indy?" His reply, "I don't know, I'm making this up as I go along." That is a great response for an adventure movie, but most of us do not want life to be an adventure. We operate as Calvinists even in the minutest details of our lives. When I get out of bed in the morning, I have a goal, a purpose. That goal or purpose is to get to work on time. That is not the beginning, it is the end. Everything I do, even before I get out of bed is the means to attain that goal. I had probably set the alarm the night before. Now I must get out of bed, shower, get dressed, make breakfast, drink some coffee, start the automobile and drive a designated route to get me to work on time. You and I simply do not operate without a goal and a plan to achieve that goal, even if it is brewing the morning coffee. In fact, my morning is so planned that I would be very stressed out if something in my routine went awry and I was late for work.

When I do all of that, I have declared the end from the beginning and I know the things that are not yet, shower, breakfast, coffee, driving, as though they were. I am not all-powerful and all-knowing, so something might happen to disrupt my plan, but if I was all-powerful and all-knowing, nothing would or could disrupt my planning. Again, man is created in the image of God, so we do not operate without a plan (usually a very rational one) unless circumstances overwhelm or surprise us. Circumstances never overwhelm nor surprise God, so His plan is always carried to completion.

Now most people would say that God had no plan. He simply sent his Son to die and the rest He made up as He

went along waiting upon people to either trust in or deny Christ. But we simply do not live our lives that way and neither does God. God declares that he will redeem a people unto himself to honor, praise and glorify Him. That is the end. (At least the end as we know it and the beginning of eternity.) Everything that has happened before the world was created up to the present time and into the future was the means whereby God's plan is being accomplished.

"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 likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Rom 8:29-30).

We have not yet been glorified, but we will be, because it is part of God's plan and God's plan cannot be thwarted, altered and has no need of change, because there are no surprises or circumstances to surprise God or hinder his plan.

V. The Problem of Disunity

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut 6:4).

When I get thirsty, I want something to drink. My mind says get up and go to the kitchen. My legs take me to the kitchen in perfect harmony with my mind. My arms lift my hands and open the kitchen cabinet to grab a glass. My feet move to the sink and my hands turn on the faucet. My eyes watch until the glass is full then my hands turn off the water and lift the glass to my mouth.

Unfortunately, in life, there are people for whom this task would not be so simple. Their bodies do not move in harmony. Life without unity of both purpose and action is very difficult. No one would want to live that way if we had

a choice. Those of us who have no such problem should praise God each day for his blessing and mercy.

The Trinity is a great mystery, but the Bible declares that God is one. That means that there must be, in the Trinity, a unity of both purpose and action. Jesus made it clear that this is so when he said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38). And of the Holy Spirit it is written, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (John 16:13-15).

So there is perfect unity within the one Godhead. That means, if God has chosen some to be saved, it is those for whom Christ died and those whom the Holy Spirit must quicken unto salvation. For Christ to die for all men and yet for some to be saved whom God has not chosen is a disunity of purpose and action. For Christ to die for all men and the Holy Spirit only save some is a disunity of purpose and action.

Ultimately this disunity makes the Trinity dysfunctional for Christ could die for all men and the Holy Spirit could save none and, ultimately, it makes God powerless, his will overturned by the whimsical decisions of men. We do not want to function in disunity of purpose and action and certainly God does not do so. The act of redemption is, from beginning to end, purposed and carried out by the one and only true and living God. There is and must be perfect unity in the Godhead. Christ died for those whom God chose, and the Holy Spirit saves those whom God chose and for whom Christ died. Those and no other.

VI. Selective Love

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined

us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace.” (Eph 1:4-6).

All of us have seen pictures on television of children in other countries living in poverty. We also witness the suffering of children in our own country because of sickness or neglect or poverty. Such pictures may tear at our heart strings and cause us to look with great compassion on this suffering multitude. Our Lord Himself had compassion on the people and God is a God of great compassion and love.

But when it comes time for birthdays or Christmas or some other holiday or time of giving, I do not send presents to all of those suffering children of the world. I do not buy them clothes or feed them or pay for their college education. I would not die for them. The reason is simple. I do not have the same relationship to those children as my own. I may have compassion for them and mourn their suffering, but I do not love them with same kind of love my own children receive from me. If I did, my children would no longer be special. They would just be thrown in with the rest of the children of the world.

So most of us are very selective in our love. There is that one special person we meet and set our affection upon and fall in love with and with whom we want to spend the rest of our lives. A husband does not want his wife to love all men the way she loves him. A wife does not want her husband to love all women the way he loves her. So we are very selective in our love. We only bestow our special love on those we choose. Yet we want God to love all mankind the same. We don't want Him to love us in any special way. That is what most Christianity teaches and yet does not love that way itself.

God's love is very special. God told Israel, “The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers

that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deut 7:7-8).

God's love is very special toward his chosen people. “Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.” (Zech 2:8). So it is with those we love in a special, wonderful and affectionate way, and so it is with God's special, wonderful, selective and elective love to his chosen children. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace.” (Eph 1:4-6). O believer in Christ never doubt the very special, selective and elective love of God for you. “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Pet 2:9).

VII. Summary

In summary, we are made in the image of God. He is the Creator, of course, and we are his creatures. He is, by His nature, many things we are not. Sin has also blinded us to the true glories of what we can or should have been. But, there are also many ways in which we, being made in God's image, imitate Him. Our lives are lived with a purpose and a goal. Everything we do moves in harmony and unity to achieve our desired ends. We know what we want and we strive in all of our thoughts and actions to achieve our goals, even though they may be the wrong goals and circumstances hinder or even prevent our ever achieving them.

Man's biggest problem has always been that he thinks he is and wants to be in absolute control of his life. We would like to know the end from the beginning and the things that are not yet as though they were, especially if we could determine the outcome. God has and can and will and does determine the end from the beginning and work his

Trinitarian person in perfect unity of purpose to achieve the goal of saving a people to glorify and praise Him for all eternity. No one is likely to read this paper who is not already saved. But know this, if you are saved, you are also of the elect, chosen by God as one of his own before the foundation of the world, saved by the Son, regenerated by the Holy Spirit. You are loved with a very special love of God for his people. Rejoice not in your ability to choose God, but that God, of his very own completely sovereign and free will has chosen you and will keep you unto the end, safe in his electing love and grace.