

Eternal Security ~ Part 10

Calvinistic Theology ~ Part 1

In my last post, we looked at the influence that Calvin had on theology, education and church government. In this post, we will begin to explore the basic tenets of **Calvinistic Theology** as well as its spread and affirmation to the faithful. In order to ensure that I present the material on this topic and **Arminian Theology** without any preconceived bias, I have elected to utilize "*The Moody Handbook of Theology*" by Paul Enns as my source document.

The theology of **Calvinism** or the Reformed faith finds its roots in the writings of John Calvin, particularly as expressed in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin's theology centers on the sovereignty of God, the other doctrines being tied to that premise. The theology of Calvin is restated in the form of many confessional statements that have been adhered to over the centuries in Europe, Britain, and America.

Spread of Calvinism

John Calvin's influence was felt throughout Europe as his doctrinal teachings spread quickly. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563 by friends of Calvin, influenced the Reformed churches in Holland, Germany, and America. The Belgic Confession, written in 1561 by Guy de Bray, became the standard of belief in the Dutch Reformed church. The Synod of Dort met in 1618-1619, condemned Arminianism and the Remonstrants (a doctrinal statement embodying the teachings of Jacobus Arminius), and reaffirmed Calvinistic doctrine as expressed in the Heidelberg and Belgic Confessions.

Colonization of America brought Calvinism to the North American shores. The standards of the Westminster Confession became the doctrine of the Presbyterian churches.

The Synod of Dort

In the Netherlands a conflict arose between the followers of Jacobus Arminius and the Calvinists. Calvinism was attacked for its teaching of predestination and reprobation as well as for other issues. The States General called a synod in 1618 to settle the issue, but the Arminians did not come as equals. Rather, the Remonstrants were summoned to present their doctrines, which were subsequently condemned. The synod reaffirmed the Heidelberg and Belgic Confessions. The following points were affirmed at Dort and are given here in synthesized form.

- **Of divine predestination.** All men sinned in Adam and lie under the curse, but God made provision for salvation through the death of Yeshua. The fact that some and not others receive the gift of faith stems from God's eternal decree of election ¹ and reprobation. Election is unconditional, not based on God's foreknowledge; before the foundation of the world and purely out of His grace and according to His sovereign good pleasure, God chose some to salvation. The non-elect are left to condemnation, yet God is not the author of sin.
- **Of the death of Yeshua.** While the death of Yeshua is of infinite value and sufficient to save the whole world, His atoning death extends to the elect only.
- **Of the corruption of man and his conversion to God.** Man was created in the image of God, but through the sin of Adam all mankind is corrupted. Sin has passed to the human race so that all people are born in sin and are children of wrath. But while man is incapable of saving himself, God

¹ I will be dealing with the concept of election in subsequent posts. For now, see the definition in Eternal Security ~ Part 2.

accomplishes salvation for elect individuals through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Those whom He has chosen in eternity, He calls effectually in time. The faith that realizes salvation is itself a gift.

- **Of the perseverance of the saints.** Whom God calls, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin. Since God is faithful, He preserves those who believe to the end.

Westminster Confession

The Westminster Confession arose out of the stormy political scene in England during the reign of Charles I. Charles met with resistance when he attempted to impose episcopacy on the Church of Scotland and to conform its services to the Church of England's Common Book of Prayer. A civil war erupted and Oliver Cromwell led the Puritan forces to victory. Charles I was beheaded in the process. In 1643 the English parliament commissioned the Westminster Assembly to develop the creed of the Church of England. The 121 English Puritan ministers met for 1,163 daily sessions from 1643 to 1649. The **Westminster Confession of Faith**, completed in 1646, affirmed a strong Calvinistic position and disavowed "*the errors of Arminianism, Roman Catholicism, and sectarianism.*"

The following points summarize the **Westminster Confession of Faith**:

- **Scripture.** The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are recognized to provide "*divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency as an infallible rule of faith and practice.*" The traditions of Roman Catholicism, the Apocrypha, and humanism are to be rejected.
- **God.** God, who is infinite in His being, exists as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is absolutely sovereign, having from all eternity, by His own free will, ordained whatever comes to pass. The triune God has created the world out of nothing in the space of six days. God, in His providence, upholds all things by His sovereign authority.
- **Man.** Man fell from original righteousness and became dead in sin, that sin and death being imputed to all mankind. God originally entered into a covenant of works with Adam, but when he sinned, God enacted the covenant of grace. In his sin man lost all ability to will anything spiritually good.
- **Christ.** Jesus Christ is of one substance with the Father; became virgin born; as the God-Man became the Mediator, offering a perfect sacrifice. Yeshua purchased reconciliation for all those whom the Father has given Him.
- **Salvation.** Through His Word and His Spirit, God effectually calls all those whom He has predestined to eternal life. He renews their spirit and draws them to Jesus Christ. Hence, salvation is entirely by grace. God justifies these believers, declaring them righteous; He adopts them as His children; and He sanctifies them. Saving faith is a gift of the Spirit of Christ. Repentance is a doctrine to be preached along with saving faith. Good works are the fruit of a true faith.
- **Perseverance.** Those whom God has saved can neither totally nor finally fall away from grace but shall persevere to the end and be eternally saved.
- **Assurance.** Only true believers will have assurance that they are in the state of grace; unbelievers will not have that assurance.
- **Worship.** God is to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, soul, and might. Worship is to be accorded the Father, Son, and Spirit and no one else. Prayer is to be offered to God. A lawful oath may be part of religious worship.

- **Civil duties.** God has appointed those in authority, and believers ought to pray for them; believers may also be called on to serve as magistrates.
- **Divorce.** Marriage is between one man and one woman. The innocent party may divorce when adultery or fornication has taken place.
- **Church.** The universal church consists of the whole number of the elect; the visible church consists of those who confess their faith. All believers are united to Yeshua and are in a holy fellowship in the worship of God. The sacraments are the seals of the covenant of grace. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union. Baptism is a sacrament and also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water on the person. The Lord's Supper is spiritual nourishment and promotes growth in Yeshua. No remission of sins is made in communion; it is a commemoration. Yeshua has given authority to the church officers in which they enact church discipline. For the better government of the church there ought to be synods or councils.
- **Death and judgment.** After death, bodies return to dust, but the soul immediately returns to God: the righteous are received into heaven; the wicked into hell. All authority has been given to Yeshua who will judge the world in righteousness.

In my next post, we will begin to explore the **Five Points of Calvinism and the Doctrinal Affirmations of Calvinistic Theology**.