

Eternal Security ~ Part 12

Calvinistic Theology ~ Part 3

In my last post, we began to explore **Five Points of Calvinism and the Doctrinal Affirmations of Calvinistic Theology**. In this post, we will continue to unpack the **Five Points of Calvinism**. As a reminder, 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.

Total Depravity

The word **depravity** means that because of sin's corruption "*there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God*," while **total** means that depravity "*has extended to all aspects of man's nature, to his entire being*." Calvin defined man's depraved estate as follows: "*All men are conceived in sin, and born the children of wrath, indisposed to all saving good propense [leaning or inclining toward, disposed] to evil, dead in sin, and the slaves of sin; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they neither are willing nor able to return to God, to correct their depraved nature, or to dispose themselves to the correction of it.*"

The Scriptures emphasize the depravity of man by man's continual sinning (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-18). The reason is that man is born a fallen creature with the pollution of sin (Psalm 51:5). Depravity also affirms the inability of man to do good (Matthew 7:17-18; John 15:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:3). Depravity further affirms man's inability to understand the good (Matthew 13:14; John 1:11; 8:43; Acts 16:14; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; Ephesians 4:18). Depravity also indicates man cannot desire the good (Matthew 7:18; John 3:3; 6:44; 8:43; 15:4-5; Ephesians 2:1).

Total depravity indicates man's utter inability to do anything for his salvation. God must initiate the process if a person is to be saved.

Unconditional Election

Unconditional election is logically tied to the doctrine of the total depravity of man. If the Scriptures teach that man is totally depraved, dead in trespasses and sin, then man is unable to initiate a response toward God for salvation. God must act. Calvinism teaches that from eternity past, God has unconditionally elected certain ones to salvation regardless of any merit on their part. **Unconditional** emphasizes that election is not conditioned on God's foreknowledge that certain ones will believe in Jesus. Election is not conditioned on man's ability or response. **Unconditional** emphasizes that God alone initiates the process.

There are six main features involved in election.

- (1) Election is a sovereign, eternal decree of God (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11).
- (2) Election is necessary because of man's fall and total depravity. It therefore reflects the grace of God, not human effort (Romans 9:11).
- (3) Election is "in Jesus." From eternity past God chose believers to be united to Jesus (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11). In election God effects salvation through sending the Savior and effectually calling certain ones to salvation.
- (4) Election involves the salvation of the elect and the provision for their salvation. God determined to predestine, call, justify, and glorify certain ones (Romans 8:29-30). This was planned and effected in eternity past.

(5) Election and reprobation are individual, personal, specific, and particular. The pronouns in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 emphasize the individual nature of election.

(6) The goal of election is the glory and praise of God (Ephesians 1:6, 12). Everything is to ascribe glory and praise to God.

Limited Atonement

This view, also referred to as particular atonement or particular redemption, states that "*God purposed by the atonement to save only the elect and that consequently all the elect, and they alone, are saved.*" Jesus's death saves all it intended to save. Connection is again made with the preceding doctrine of unconditional election. If God has elected certain ones to salvation from eternity past, then it logically follows that He will also provide for the redemption of precisely those whom He has chosen.

The emphasis on particular atonement is seen in a number of passages (italics added): Jesus "***will save His people from their sins***" (Matthew 1:21); the Good Shepherd "***lays down His life for the sheep***" (John 10:11); Jesus prayed only for "***those You have given Me***" (John 17:9); Jesus purchased the *church of God with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28); God sent His Son, delivering "***Him up for us all***" (Romans 8:32); Jesus "***loved the church and gave Himself up for her***" (Ephesians 5:25). In each case the biblical passage suggests not everyone, but only the elect. Jesus died *for "His people," "His sheep," "the ones He prayed for," "the ones given Him by the Father," and "the church."* In a passage like John 3:16 the word "*world*" does not mean everyone, but "***the whole world in the sense of people from every tribe and nation ~ not just the Jews.***" In passages like John 1:29; 1 John 2:2, and 1 Timothy 2:6 the references that seemingly suggest everyone should rather be understood in a restricted sense. At times the Bible uses "*world*" and "*all*" in a restricted sense.

Many Calvinists emphasize that although the atonement is particular, Jesus died only for the elect, yet the offer of the gospel is for everyone. How both of these facts can be true is paradoxical ~ a mystery that cannot be explained; it is one of many "***irreconcilable***" opposites of Scripture. God's thoughts and ways are not man's thoughts and ways. He has always been faithful and true. Therefore, we trust Him where our philosophical efforts to harmonize His mysteries are utterly confounded.

In my next post, we will conclude unpacking Calvin's **Five Points of Calvinism**, as well as looking at Moody's **Summary Evaluation of Calvinistic Theology**.