

Eternal Security ~ Part 13

Calvinistic Theology ~ Part 4

In my last post, we began to unpack the **Five Points of Calvinism**. In this post, we will conclude our unpacking of the **Five Points of Calvinism**, as well as looking at Moody's **Summary Evaluation of Calvinistic Theology**. 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.

Irresistible Grace

Grace **"is the unmerited favor of God."** Calvinists emphasize the necessity of God's grace in salvation. If man can do nothing to save himself, then God must act; God must provide grace in order that man might be saved. That is the work of irresistible grace, which is also referred to as special or efficacious (because it is effective) grace.

Opponents of this doctrine might suggest that if grace is irresistible then God forces someone to come against his own will. That is not the idea of irresistible grace, according to Calvinists. It does not make someone come contrary to his will. Rather, irresistible grace makes the individual **willing** to come. Irresistible grace is the supernatural work of God whereby He works in the soul of the individual, changing the entire nature by the Ruach's operation.

In the logic of Calvinism, God, through His Spirit, draws precisely those whom God unconditionally elected from eternity past and Jesus died for. Thus the purpose of God is accomplished. He elected certain ones, Jesus died for those very ones, and now through the Ruach, God dispenses His irresistible grace to them to make them willing to come. They do not want to resist.

The scriptural basis for irresistible grace is John 6:37, 44. **"Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will certainly not turn away ... No one can come to me unless the Father — the One who sent me — draws him. And I will raise him up on the Last Day"** (John 6:37, 44). Jesus said that the precise ones whom the Father has given Him will come to Him; moreover, they do not come of themselves. They cannot come unless the Father supernaturally draws them to Jesus. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, brings all the sheep to Himself; none are left out (John 10:16). Paul also affirms that the ones Jesus elected He also justified and will ultimately glorify (Romans 8:28-30). None are lost in the process.

Irresistible grace does not remove man's responsibility to believe. Man must heed the call, **"Trust in the Lord Yeshua, and you will be saved — you and your household!"** (Acts 16:31). But when man believes in Jesus, it is God through irresistible grace who enables him to believe.

Perseverance of the Saints

This is the fifth and final factor of the five points of Calvinism. Again it should be observed that perseverance of the saints is logically connected with the preceding points. If man is totally depraved, then he cannot respond to God; God must unconditionally elect man to salvation. For those who are elected, Jesus has died to secure their salvation. God then irresistibly draws them to affect their salvation but also keeps them secure in that salvation to the end.

God, who is rich in mercy, from his immutable purpose of election, does not wholly take away His Ruach from His own, even in lamentable falls; nor does He so permit them to glide down that they should fall from the grace of adoption and the state of justification; or commit the **"sin unto death,"** or against the Ruach; that, being deserted by Him, they should cast themselves headlong into eternal destruction. So that not by their

own merits or strength, but by the gratuitous mercy of God, they obtain it, that they neither *totally fall* from faith and grace, nor *finally continue* in their falls and perish.

The doctrine of perseverance has often been expressed "*once saved, always saved.*" Concisely defined, the perseverance of the saints means that believers "*will persevere in trusting Jesus as their Savior... Thus they will always be saved.*"

The doctrine is sometimes referred to as **ETERNAL SECURITY**, which emphasizes the certainty of the salvation of the elect. However, perseverance also has an important emphasis, namely, that the Christian perseveres in believing. Although the term *perseverance* seems to suggest that continuance in the faith depends on the Believer, that is not the stress of the doctrine. Continuance in the faith is dependent on God.

Scriptural consideration for this doctrine is found in John 10:27-29 where Jesus emphasizes that He gives eternal life to the sheep and they cannot ever perish. In Romans 8:29-30 Paul indicates that the ones God foreknew, He predestined, called, justified, and will ultimately glorify. None are lost in the process. Ephesians 1:3-14 also emphasizes this truth. God the Father planned the salvation of certain ones and marked them out for salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6); God the Son secured their salvation by redeeming them through His blood (Ephesians 1:7-12); God the Holy Spirit effected their salvation by sealing them ~ the sign of their eternal security (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Summary Evaluation of Calvinistic Theology ¹

There are seven Calvinistic emphases that deserve specific evaluation.

- (1) The emphasis on the sovereignty of God is scriptural (Psalm 135:6; Daniel 4:35; Ephesians 1:11).
- (2) Predestination and election are biblical concepts. The reason many reject these doctrines is that they suppose the doctrines exclude human responsibility. However, most Calvinists recognize the antinomy (the seeming contradiction of biblical teaching about both God's sovereignty and human responsibility), and they live with it as a divine paradox. There are differences among Calvinists on how these two contrasting ideas are interrelated. To be biblical in theology both concepts must be preserved to the full extent of scriptural revelation. Human responsibility must not be sacrificed because of a myopic interpretation of the sovereign predestination and election of God.
- (3) The doctrine of total depravity is consistent with Scripture (cf. Ephesians 2:1). The Fall did not merely wound man; man died spiritually, thus affecting his mind, heart, and will. As a result of the Fall man is not disposed to seek God (Romans 3:11).
- (4) Unconditional election is both a logical necessity and a scriptural emphasis. Believers are chosen from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). The corollary doctrine of reprobation (that God decreed the non-elect to suffer eternally in hell) is not sustained by Scripture, at least in the clear way that positive election is. Although John Calvin taught reprobation, not all Calvinists agree on that point.
- (5) The doctrine of limited atonement may well be the most controversial point of Calvinism ~ some Calvinists accept it, while moderate ones either categorically reject it or modify it. Many moderates say that Jesus *actually* died only for the elect but *potentially* died for all. Strict Calvinists insist that limited atonement is a logical necessity in view of God's sovereignty. If Jesus died for everyone and not everyone is saved, then God has been defeated; for His sovereign purpose to be accomplished, Jesus died only for the elect, and precisely those, and only those, are saved. Although the doctrine may be

¹ I want to re-emphasize that this is Moody's summary. I will differ my analysis of the tenets of Calvinism until later in this series.

defensible logically, it is difficult to sustain biblically. In limited atonement, Scriptures that indicate Jesus died for the world (John 3:16) must be restricted to the elect; moreover, passages like 1 Timothy 2:6, 2 Peter 2:1, and 1 John 2:2 teach that Jesus died for everyone.

(6) Irresistible grace is also a necessity if humanity is totally depraved. Correctly understood, irresistible grace does not teach that God brings people into the kingdom contrary to their wills, but rather He moves upon their wills to effect willingness to come to Jesus for salvation.

(7) Perseverance of the saints (security of the believer) is a strong emphasis of Scripture. Since salvation is a result of grace, with the believer being chosen from the foundation of the world, being redeemed by Jesus, and being sealed by the Spirit, loss of salvation is impossible.

In my next post, we will begin to explore **Jacobus Arminius and Arminian Theology**.