

OpenTheo

The Five Points of Calvinism - An Overview



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In this overview, Steve Gregg describes Calvinism, a theological system that emphasizes God's absolute control over everything that happens. The five points of Calvinism are represented by the acronym TULIP, which stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. While the idea of God ordaining everything that happens can lead to questions about fairness and impugning the character of God, Calvinists believe that this system glorifies God by choosing the elect and condemning the reprobate.

Transcript

I've been asked to talk about an overview of Calvinism tonight. And, of course, Calvinism is a subject that comes up a lot in people's questions. And I usually direct them to listen to my lecture series online, which is 12 lectures an hour each, covering all the aspects of Calvinism, the five points, both the case for them and the case against them.

So let me talk to you about the five points of Calvinism. As I said, if you hold any of them in a truly Calvinistic sense, you must hold the others unless you're simply not a consistent thinker, because it is a consistent logic. And I think it is the consistency of the logic that appeals so much to these young intellectual type Christians who are looking for something that just really they can lay hold on and think it's very logical.

Now, my problem with Calvinism is that though it's very logical, I believe it starts from a premise that isn't true. And it ends up presenting a God whose character is different than, I think, the God of the Bible. And this is not a small problem.

I think it can be a big problem for some people. The main issue, before we talk about the five points, the main issue that usually is represented as the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is the issue of the sovereignty of God. You may have heard this.

Calvinists say they take a high view of the sovereignty of God. And they say the problem with Arminians is they don't take a high view of the sovereignty of God. They take a high view of the free will of man.

Now, when people say that, they're usually Calvinists. Well, they always are Calvinists when they say that. And they are using the word sovereignty in a way that is unique to Calvinism.

And, you know, what is sovereignty? Do Arminians believe in the sovereignty of God? Yes. When I debated Doug Wilson, a Calvinist in Idaho, he said, well, the difference is, he said, I, meaning himself a Calvinist, believe in absolute sovereignty of God. And I said, well, I believe in the absolute sovereignty of God, too, but we have to define what sovereignty is.

You see, sovereignty to the Calvinists, well, let me just say what it means to me first. What sovereignty means to me is what it means in the dictionary. The word doesn't appear in the Bible, by the way, so you don't have the word sovereignty in the Bible, so you can't use the Bible to define it that way.

In a dictionary, the word sovereign refers to somebody who is the absolute authority, like a king, a monarch, or a sovereign nation, like a nation that doesn't have to answer to other nations. In other words, a nation that's not in the United Nations, you know, a nation that actually is free to act in its own interests and is not beholden to any other nations. We don't have monarchies in the Western modern world, but we used to.

A monarch in the old days was simply the guy who, he made the rules, and he had the right to do it. He was the king. Being a king meant you had sovereign authority to do things, and you pretty much were not answerable for your decisions.

This would be, of course, in the more ancient monarchies, a monarchy like England, which has been sort of more of a democratic type of monarchy for many centuries, that would be different. But the old idea of a king being the one who he can make the decisions, he has the authority to act, and to not be challenged by anybody, that's what sovereign really does mean. Do Armenians believe that about God? Of course.

As an Armenian, I believe that God, I'm not really an Armenian, I'm a non-Calvinist, but if you're not a Calvinist, they'll call you an Armenian. But the truth is, I believe, and I can't imagine any Christian who does not believe, that God has the right to do whatever he wants to do. God is God.

He made everything. He can make it how he wants to make it. He can do what he wants to do with it.

That's not a problem. I have no problem with the absolute sovereignty of God, meaning that God has the absolute right to do with his creation whatever he wants to do. But Calvinism adds another aspect to the definition that doesn't really belong to the definition.

Calvinism uses the word sovereignty to mean what I would call, and what some others

have called, meticulous providence. Now you might say, I don't even know what that means. Well, think of it.

Meticulous means detailed, down to the last detail. Providence means God is providentially acting. You know, if you're praying for money to pay your rent, and money comes in, you say, that's providence.

God provided that. Well, Calvinists believe that God providentially does everything. Everything that happens is the providence of God.

Every detail. Everything is ordained by God. By his decrees, they happen.

Now these are very Calvinist statements. See, the Bible never even refers to decrees at all, but it's one of the main issues in Calvinism. You know, God has these sovereign decrees, and what they mean by that, in terms of the controversy, is that God decrees who's going to be saved and who's not.

Now I believe God decrees who's going to be saved and who's not. If we mean by that, he decrees that those who accept Christ or who follow Christ can be saved, and those who don't are not. He can make the rules.

He can even, if he wants to, individually choose people to be saved or not. But does he? That's the question. Calvinism says God actually decides before anyone was born, he knows everyone before they're born, he knows what he's going to do, he knows who he's going to save and who's not, and he decrees that certain people will be elect.

That is chosen. The word elect means chosen. To be saved.

And the others, the term is reprobate. Those who are not elect are the reprobate. And that everybody, from the time they're born and even before they're born, is already on one of the two lists.

God has a list, as it were, not a written list, literally, but he has a list of the elect and a list of the reprobate. And when you're born, you're in one of those lists before you know it. And therefore, you really aren't going to make any choices about that that are gonna make any difference.

If you're born on God's reprobate list, you can't be saved. If you're born on God's elect list, you can't not be saved. It's inevitable that you'll be saved.

This is because of what they believe about the sovereignty of God. Now, R.C. Sproul, for example, in his book *Chosen by God*, kind of begins the book by saying that he asked a classroom, because he was a professor, how many of you believe that God ordains everything that happens? And some of the hands went up. He said, how many of you are atheists? He said, none of the hands went up.

He said, well, all of you who didn't raise your hand the first time should have raised your hand the second time. This is his logic. This is if God does not ordain all that happens, then he is not God.

And if he's not God, then there's no God. So if you don't believe that God ordains everything that happens, you don't believe in God. Now, actually, there's another step.

He said, if God doesn't ordain all things that happen, he's not sovereign. And if he's not sovereign, he's not God. So, you know, essentially, R.C. Sproul said that people like me are atheists, because I don't believe that God ordains everything that happens.

I don't believe that God ordained that Adam and Eve had to sin inevitably. Calvinists believe that. Calvinists believe that before God made Adam and Eve, he already ordained that they would inevitably eat that fruit.

There's no way it could go any other direction. It was foreordained, it's predestined. And so with everything in your life, every sin you commit, foreordained, predestined by God, that's sovereignty, according to Calvinism.

Now, see, that's a very different issue than sovereignty, according to any dictionary or the normal use of the word. The word sovereign refers to somebody who has the right to make decisions about things within his realm, and he can make them without worrying about someone else contradicting or forcing him to do something else. Now, kings who are sovereign in their domains, they don't necessarily foreordain everything that their subjects do, and that doesn't challenge their sovereignty.

A king can be a tyrant if he wants to. He can do his best to control everything people do, make them all wake up when he wants them to wake up, eat for breakfast when he wants them to eat for breakfast, marry who he wants them to marry, have the children he wants them to have, you know, go to bed when he wants them to, have the job. A tyrant can try to do that, but that's not the only way he can be sovereign.

The same sovereign can say, you know, I want to give these people some liberty here. I would like to have these people make some choices of their own. I will make the laws, and I will enforce the laws.

People can decide whether they'll keep those laws or not. If they break the laws, they'll have to suffer the consequences. That's their choice.

Now, if a king set up his kingdom that way, he's still sovereign. He's still absolutely sovereign because he made the decision out of his pure authoritative right to make such a decision. Let's take a smaller situation which we can relate to more.

Let's say a father is sovereign over his children in his home. The children have to obey him. He can make their bedtime be any time he wants it to be.

He can tell them when they can have food and when they can't have food. I mean, when they can watch TV and when they can't. But a father doesn't have to control everything his children do every moment of every day in order to maintain his authority.

He may want to give them some free time. He might want to give them some choices to make. That's a sovereign choice he can make.

That God is sovereign does not tell us how much he micromanages everything in the universe. That's a separate issue. And the Bible, of course, teaches that God is a king, that he's a father, that he's Lord.

And therefore, you know, whatever he wills, he does. The Bible says that many times. Whatever he wants to do in heaven, earth, he does it.

Well, that's great. But the second question is, what does he want to do? Does he want to micromanage everybody's life? Make everybody have the thoughts that he insists that they have and preordain every thought and action they do? Or does he want to do something else? The impression that the Bible gives very strongly is that when God made man, he made man in such a way that man can make choices that disappoint God. And God expresses disappointment a great deal in the Bible, especially in the prophets.

But he was very disappointed. At the time of the flood with humanity, he seemed disappointed with Cain. Actually, he seemed very disappointed with Adam and Eve when they sinned.

And in the prophets, he's very disappointed with Israel and Judah. And he's saying, why'd you do that? I never told you to do that. I never crossed my mind to tell you to do such things.

God always acts like people did things that he didn't want them to do. So how could he be sovereignly decreeing everything? Well, Calvinists have an answer to that, too. We haven't gotten to the five points yet, but just talk about sovereignty.

They would say God has his revealed will, and he has his secret, decreed will. Now, his revealed will is when he gives things like the Ten Commandments, says don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't murder. He's revealing his will in that way, but he's got a secret will.

And that is, even though he says don't commit murder, he might ordain that you will inevitably commit murder. That's his secret will. It's not a secret once it happens, but until it happens, it's a secret.

The Bible says God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the Bible says not everyone does repent. Some do perish.

And so how can that be if God's not willing that any should perish? Well, his revealed will is that people should repent, but his secret decree is that many will not repent. In other words, God's got two wills at different levels. The one he tells us about, and then there's this other one that's the opposite of his revealed will, which is his real secret intentions.

Now, if that is true of God, and the Bible does not say that it is anywhere, if that is true of God, then we have to ask, how can we know if he's really serious when he tells us that it is his will for us to do something or another? Maybe it's not. Maybe he has a secret decree that's the opposite of what he's saying. How can we really know what his will is if it's a big secret? And what's the point of him revealing one thing if it's not really his real will? What's up with that? Now, the reason Calvinists say there are these kinds of things is because, for example, when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, it all worked out for the good.

Now, the selling of your brother into slavery is a bad thing to do. It's a sin. His brothers sinned by doing it.

But when it was all over, in Genesis chapter 50, in verse 10, when Joseph is talking to his brothers, he says, Now, you see, they say, see, the brothers were doing something that God would have revealed as a wrong act. He would have revealed, do not sell your brother into slavery. That's an evil, immoral thing.

But God meant it to happen for good. So it was really his secret will that it should happen. Now, we have a similar situation with the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus was crucified as a result of a whole bunch of people's sins. Judas Iscariot, Caiaphas, Pilate, a lot of sinners involved in Jesus' crucifixion. And they were doing things that God says people should not do.

You shouldn't lie. You shouldn't kill innocent people. I mean, there's a lot of things that God says shouldn't be done that were done.

And yet, the Bible says that it was according to the will of God that Jesus died for our sins. Now, they take those two especially, maybe a few others in the Old Testament too, but those two are favorites because those two are cases where we are specifically told that the sins of Joseph's brothers and the sins of those who were orchestrating the crucifixion of Christ, which we know to be sinful behavior and therefore what God would not want people to do, that the results of it was in fact something God meant to happen. And so, they'd say, you see, the sins were violating God's revealed will, but the outcome was God's actual will.

And what they would say then is, therefore, God, who ordains everything, actually put it in the hearts of Joseph's brothers to sell their brother into slavery. He put it in the heart of Judas and Caiaphas and Pilate because God ordains everything, even the sins that

people do, for his will. And so, he decreed that Judas would have to do that.

Now, the problem I have with that is the Bible does say that Judas was influenced in his decision, but the Bible says the devil put it in his heart. It doesn't say that God put it into his heart. There's not a word in the Bible that says that God put anything into Judas' heart.

But the Bible specifically says the devil entered into him and put it in his heart. So, I'm not prepared to let what the devil inspired Judas to do to be attributed to what God inspired him to do. But you might say, but how could these things have happened if these sins weren't committed? How could Joseph have ended up in Egypt to save his people from famine? How could Jesus have died for our sins if these people hadn't done these bad things? Well, I don't know, but I'm sure there are ways they could happen if one person didn't sin, another person might.

I mean, for example, Joseph's brothers, they hated Joseph. They probably would have loved to have killed him. In fact, they first planned to.

They said, let's kill him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams. And then, you know, Reuben says, no, let's not kill it.

Let's just sell him into slavery. So, he got sold to slavery. But how many times earlier in his life would they have loved to do the same thing, but God didn't deliver him into their hands? God only had to let them do what they naturally wanted to do.

All he had to do is stop protecting Joseph from them, and they carried out those plans. God knew they would, but God didn't put it in their hearts. God doesn't inspire evil.

God does not tempt with sin. And what about Judas? What about Caiaphas? A lot of these people who killed Jesus, they tried to kill him a lot of times earlier, by the way, and it didn't work out for them because it wasn't his hour. And God could have made it never be his hour.

If God didn't want Jesus to die, he could have made sure that no one ever laid a glove on him. But actually, God did want him to die. So, at a certain point, God didn't protect Jesus anymore.

And he could have. I mean, Jesus himself said, I could call twelve legions of angels and they'd deliver me. He didn't because that wasn't the will of God.

God wanted Jesus to die, so God didn't want to intervene to protect him from these people's evil desires. Those evil desires were present without God initiating them. These were evil people.

And if Judas hadn't wanted to do it, somebody else could. Some people say, poor Judas,

he was predestined to crucify Jesus. It wasn't even his fault.

The Bible doesn't say anywhere that Judas was predestined to do anything. He fulfilled prophecies that said somebody who sat at the table with the Messiah would betray him. Lots of people sat at Jesus' table who could have betrayed him.

There's a lot of Pharisees. Jesus ate at the table of Pharisees and publicans and sinners. There's a lot of people from whom somebody could have arisen to do that.

Judas happened to be a willing guy who was handy and did it, wanted to do it. Judas wasn't personally predestined to do that. How could that be? How could God predestine somebody to be evil and then punish them for being evil? And yet that's exactly what Calvinism says happens.

And if you say, well, that's not fair, you know what they say? Who are you, old man? Answer against God. Has not the potter power over the clay? In other words, if you think there's something that's not quite just in God ordaining people before they're born to inevitably do bad things that they have no real choice about, that they're more like programmed units that God programmed to do certain things, and then he's going to make them punished for it and suffer for it. And of course, almost all Calvinists believe that means eternal torment.

That's an interesting kind of a God you've got there. I mean, how could you be angry at somebody who's doing what you programmed them to do? Now, if somebody has a choice and they do bad things, I can see getting angry at that. But if they don't have a choice and you're the one who wanted them to do that in the first place, why punish them for it? It just doesn't really make much sense, I have to say, to me and to most people.

In fact, it didn't make sense to the early church fathers. Before Augustine, many of the church fathers addressed this issue because the idea that God ordains everything that happens was present, not in the church, but in the heresy called Manicheanism in the centuries of the early church before Augustine. Manicheanism did teach that God ordains everything that happens, that everything is fated to occur, that nothing happens that wasn't already fated to occur.

When you do evil, you were intended to do evil. When you do good, you were made to do good. And there are many of the church fathers before Augustine who addressed that as a heresy and said, then how could God hold people responsible? That was their argument, and a very good one, it seems to me.

If God made you to do the wrong thing, why would he punish you for it? And if he made you inevitably do the right thing, why would he reward you for it? He's doing all the choosing. He's doing everything. Calvinists don't like to be said that that makes him a

puppet master, but frankly, it's hard to avoid that particular parallel.

Any Calvinist who, if you tell them, you think God's a puppet master, they would object to that strongly, but they can't really give a good reason to object to it because their doctrine is that God, in fact, ordains everything that happens. And, you know, I won't go further into this, but that idea of sovereignty has to be on the table first if we're going to understand Calvinism. Yes, those who are not Calvinists believe God is absolutely sovereign, but don't believe in meticulous providence.

We don't believe that everything that happens is God making it happen. There's plenty of evil in people to get them to sin without God making them do it. And, you know, Joseph's brothers, the people who engineered the death of Jesus, those people were wicked people.

Many of them had tried to find opportunity to do the same thing earlier but weren't permitted to, but God finally allowed it to happen. Now, let me talk about the five points of Calvinism. As I said, these, once you've got the first one in place, you have to have the other four.

The first is called total depravity and is the T in the acrostic, tulip, total depravity. The second one is the U in the acrostic, which is unconditional election. The third is the L, which is limited atonement.

The fourth one is the I in the word tulip, and that's irresistible grace. And the P is the perseverance of the saints. Now, when I was younger and I didn't really, I hadn't really studied Calvinism much, but I had heard these things, I thought, well, I can accept total depravity.

And I didn't even have much problem with unconditional election, though I haven't thought it through much. Limited atonement, that sounded not good to me. I would have held off on that one.

Irresistible grace, meaning that if you're chosen, you're going to irresistibly be drawn to God. I would have thought, well, I can think of some scriptures that seem to contradict that. And perseverance of the saints, that's generally speaking, once saved, always saved.

I did believe that when I was a Baptist, and so I probably would have thought three of the points, probably total depravity, unconditional election, and perseverance would fit with my Baptist thinking at the time. Limited atonement, irresistible grace, not so much, probably not at all. However, I didn't understand those three points that I thought I was agreeing with.

If I had understood them, I wouldn't have agreed with any of them. So let's start with total depravity. Let me tell you how the Calvinists understand total depravity.

Total depravity is that ever since the fall, man is totally depraved or totally evil in his motivations. Now, they don't mean that he can't be any worse. They don't believe in absolute depravity.

In other words, they know that although you're a sinner, you could be worse. You do refrain from some things. You probably don't kill people every time you're angry at them.

You probably don't commit adultery every time you have the temptation to do that. In other words, you could do worse than you're doing. So they don't believe in absolute depravity, which couldn't be worse, but they believe in total depravity.

They say that everything you do when you're unregenerated, before you're born again, everything you do is shot through with sinful motivation, partly because you're not doing anything for the glory of God. If you're not a believer, if you're not born again, you may do religious things and even good deeds, but you're not doing it for the glory of God. So even that's motivated unworthily.

And therefore, everything that an unbeliever does is depraved. They're totally depraved. They can do nothing that's good or pleasing to God in their unconverted or in their unregenerated state.

Now, usually Calvinists, once they get on this, they wax quite eloquent about how evil all people are who are not regenerated. And if you want to get a good example, you could probably read Jonathan Edwards' sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. And he says, God hates you.

God despises you. You're more loathsome to him than the most loathsome spider is to us. You know, I mean, he loves to pile it on.

And, you know, when you get these Calvinists talking about this, they'll say, you know, those who aren't regenerated, they hate God. They absolutely hate God. They would hate to go to heaven.

They'd be much happier in hell, even if they're in torment, because they hate God that much. And because they hate God, they cannot repent. They have no inclination.

They're totally depraved. There's no inclination to turn to God. There's no inclination to trust God.

There's no inclination to love God. They're totally depraved. And what that means, of course, is that nobody in that condition can do anything that would get them saved.

Make it ever so easy. Just say, oh, all you have to do is believe and you'll be saved. They can't do that.

They are too evilly inclined to even want to believe or want to get right with God. Now,

this is often massaged with the illustration that Paul gives of people, the Ephesian Christians, before they were saved, as being dead in trespasses and sins. Paul uses the same expression in Colossians to the Colossians and the Ephesians are both described as having been dead in trespasses and sins.

And so they just say, look, every unbeliever is dead in trespasses and sins. Even children from birth, you're dead in trespasses and sins. Now, that's certainly extending Paul's teaching far beyond Paul's teaching, because Paul didn't say anything about babies.

He's talking to these adult converts, these pagans who had become Christians not so long ago, mostly converted by him personally. He said before they were converted, they were dead in trespasses and sins. He didn't say they were born that way, they were that way as children.

He said they were pagans. And in their pagan condition, this is the expression he uses, dead. You can find it in Ephesians chapter 2, for example, where he says at the beginning of chapter 2 of Ephesians, And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience.

Among them also we all once had our conduct ourselves, conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who's rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. Now, he's talking about their conversion.

I was dead, and now I'm alive. Now, the Calvinists love to really press this metaphor of death, and it is a metaphor. Because none of you, before you became Christians, were dead.

None of you have yet been dead, literally. You will die, but none of you have yet gone there, unless you've resurrected. To say someone was dead might have any number of metaphorical meanings.

But he's not talking literally. They were not corpses. Now, what the Calvinist says, well, they were spiritually dead.

And that, in fact, almost everybody reading Ephesians 2 is saying, he's talking about being spiritually dead. Well, maybe he is. He doesn't say that.

There's no expression spiritually dead in the Bible. They know that these people were not physically dead, so Paul must mean they were spiritually dead. Well, he might mean that, but there's some other possibilities, too.

People are sometimes said to be dead, for example, when they are on the brink of death. For example, when Abimelech took Abraham's wife, Sarah, into his harem, God woke him, and he says, you're a dead man. Well, the man wasn't literally, he's not saying you're spiritually dead.

He's saying you're in danger, imminent danger, of death. I'm going to kill you if you don't stop doing what you're doing. That's what he's saying.

If you're stuck on a train track in your car, and you can't get the doors open, and a train's coming, and it's only a few feet away, someone in the car is going to say, we're dead. And they're not literally dead at that moment, but they will be soon. It's very often the case that someone is said to be dead when, in fact, death is seemingly inevitable and imminent.

A very common way of speaking. But there's also that way which Jews commonly spoke of somebody being dead to them, like a Jewish son who would go off and do something shameful to the family. They would say, you're dead to us.

The prodigal son's father used this expression of his son. When his son came home, he said, my son was dead, but now he's alive. He was lost, but now he's found.

He means he was dead to me. He wasn't dead. He was alive doing stuff.

You know, he's a living man. But to me, he was dead. To me, he was lost.

Now he's alive. Alive means he's restored to relationship with his father. To say that a person is dead because of their sins can certainly mean dead to God.

Meaning the relationship is broken. It's a deadly situation, certainly for the person who's alienated from God. But the dead there does not mean you literally are dead and can't do anything.

You see, sometimes non-Calvinists will say that it's like I was drowning in the sea and God threw me a life preserver and I grabbed the life preserver and that was Jesus and I got saved. Calvinists say, no, that's not a correct illustration. You were dead at the bottom of the sea.

Your lungs were filled with water. You had no breath. Your heart was not beating.

God had to scuba dive down there and pull you out and resuscitate you. You were dead. You weren't able to reach out and grab a life preserver.

Dead people can't do that. See, they're pushing this metaphor of death really strongly. But you see, the problem with that is what they're saying is someone who's spiritually dead in trespass and sins can't make a decision to obey God.

They can't believe. They can't repent. They're totally depraved.

They're beyond hope unless God unilaterally does something for them. Now, how they would get that out of this metaphor, I do not know. I mean, for example, they know that unregenerate people who are dead in sins make lots of decisions every day.

They decide what they're going to have for breakfast. They decide who they're going to marry. They decide what they're going to do for a living and whether they're going to go to work or not.

They decide how they're going to spend their money. They decide if they're going to be faithful to their wife. Lots of decisions.

A lot of them are moral decisions. And everyone knows that people who are supposedly spiritually dead make decisions of all kinds every day. But the Calvinist says, oh, but there's only one kind they can't make.

They can't make a decision to turn to God. Well, where are you getting that exception? It's not in the passage, certainly. There's nothing in the passage to suggest that there's – Paul is using the word dead to suggest there's just one thing they can't do.

They can do a whole lot of other things. They can't do that one thing. Well, the prodigal son was dead, and he made a decision.

He was in a far country, alienated from his father, lost and dead, according to Jesus, who made up the words in that parable. And the son said, you know, I'm going to go back to my father and say, Father, I've sinned against heaven and your son. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Make me one of your servants. And he did. That's a decision to return to his father.

And Jesus put that decision into the mouth and the mind and the heart of a person that Jesus was making up for the purpose of illustration of salvation. He put that into the heart of somebody who was in the parable itself. He was said to be dead when he made that decision.

So anyone who says, well, we were dead and trespassed of sins, and that means we couldn't make a decision for Christ, couldn't believe. Well, they're reading into the passage something that's not slightly even implied. They're just making stuff up.

Some Calvinists made it up, Augustine, and people just kind of apparently without thinking assumed that he must be right. But look at Colossians 2, the other place where Paul talks about people being dead in sins. This is interesting because you'll see that Paul does not assume that when we're dead in sins, we couldn't believe.

You'll see in Colossians 2, verse 12, that we were buried with him in baptism in which

you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead. And you being dead in your trespasses, this is verse 13, you being dead in your trespasses and uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with him, having forgiven you all your trespasses. Now, the sentence structure is he has made you alive, having, that is having previously justified you, have forgiven you.

Well, everywhere Paul talks about justification, how does someone get justified in the Bible? Anyone know any doctrines in the New Testament about justification? What was Luther's doctrine of justification? How is one justified? By faith, okay? A person is justified by faith. That means they have to have faith in order to be justified. Now, Paul says, you were dead, God raised you, having justified you previously.

Well, if he justified you previously, you must have had faith previously. You're justified by faith. And Paul makes the order this.

You have faith, you were justified, and thus God brought you to life from dead. That means that when you were dead, you believed and were justified. There's no way to take the grammar of that sentence properly without making justification, which means also faith that causes justification, prior to being made alive.

Now, the Calvinists, of course, I can't refute everything they say here right now, we don't have time, but their position being what it is about total depravity, I would never have accepted it even when I thought I accepted it. When I used to think I believed in total depravity, what I meant is everybody's a sinner. I believed in universal sinfulness.

I still believe that. I believe that everybody's a sinner. And I just thought when you hear total depravity, it just means you're admitting that everyone's a sinner.

And sure, okay, why not? Of course. But that's not what it means then. It means that everything that a person does before they are regenerated is sinful and sinfully motivated.

And they cannot, because they're dead in their sinfulness, they cannot turn to God. Now, it's an interesting question, what about Cornelius? Cornelius didn't hear the gospel until Peter came to him, but before that, Cornelius was praying and giving gifts, and an angel came to him and said, God has heard your prayers. God is pleased with what you're doing.

Send messengers to get this guy named Peter, and he'll tell you some words on how you can be saved. Well, that's interesting. The man was not saved.

He was not regenerated. But he was praying. He was seeking God.

And in a way that an angel, no less, told him was pleasing to God. So where are we getting this idea that an unregenerate man cannot turn to God and cannot seek God? He

can. He did.

The Bible does not support the Calvinist idea in any verse of Scripture. But it refutes it in a great number of verses of Scripture. But now that you've got T, tulip, T, total depravity, that it's necessary to have the U, unconditional election.

Now, remember, election means choosing. God chooses who he's going to save. And the emphasis here is on unconditional.

Why? Because the sinner cannot meet any conditions. He's dead. If the sinner is dead and entrusted to sin, there's no conditions ever so simple as God might set them that he can do.

A dead man can do nothing. So even if God just says, well, just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be saved. Well, the unregenerate man can't do that.

He's dead. So what? That means that God has to decide who he's going to save before and without them doing anything. Everybody's in the same boat.

Everybody's dead. But God elects this one and this one here and this one here and this one here and this one here. But not these other ones.

He chooses from the mass of humanity which ones he will save. And then he regenerates them. He brings them to life from the dead.

And having done so, he gives them the gifts of faith and the gift of repentance. In other words, if you have faith and have repented, it's not because you made a decision. You couldn't.

God made that decision that you would, and maybe your spouse would not, or maybe your kids would not, or maybe your parents would not, or your best friend would not. Some do, some don't. It's God's decision.

It's unilateral. Since people are all dead in trespasses and sins until they're regenerated, God has to regenerate them unconditionally. And he has to choose which ones he will.

He makes that choice unconditionally. Now, Arminius taught something different. Arminius taught that God chooses who he'll save, but he does so by foreseeing their faith.

That is, he believed a person could have faith, and God foresees the faith of some, and therefore he chooses that he will save them because he foresees their faith. Calvinists will have nothing of that because that's not unconditional then. God can't foresee something you doing, something you can't do as a dead person.

You can't have faith in the future unless God gives you the faith. So it's not enough for

the Calvinists to say, God foresaw who would believe and chose to save them in advance because he knew they would do it. That's Arminianism, not Calvinism.

Calvinism is God just makes it happen to those that he wants to make it happen. Now, this is very important in the matter of God's sovereignty. God can save anyone he wants to.

Does he save everybody? According to Calvinism, no, he does not. But he can save anyone he wants to, can he? Yes. Then does that mean he doesn't want to save certain people? Absolutely, it means that.

Calvinism believes that God glorifies himself in choosing and saving the elect, and also in condemning and torturing or tormenting the reprobate. On the one hand, he magnifies his grace. On the other hand, he magnifies his justice.

So in order to glorify himself, magnify his grace and justice, he made a whole human race from which he decided to elect unconditionally to save totally undeserving sinners who were no different than the ones he didn't save. And he just elected unconditionally to save those ones, give them faith, give them repentance, and he chose equally unconditionally to damn these ones because he could have saved them all if he wanted to. Calvinism does not believe that God wants everyone saved.

It's clear he only loves the elect. Now some Calvinists say, no, he loves all people, but he doesn't love everyone redemptively. He loves all people, but he only loves the elect redemptively.

Well, what kind of strange love is that? That this person is dead, on the way to an eternal torment in hell, and God can save him and says, I don't think I will. I'm going to let him go. That's love? And Calvinists say, well, God didn't decide that they would go to hell.

Everyone's on the way to hell, and God just saves some, and he just lets the others go their way. He just kind of passes by and doesn't save them. Well, that's still the same.

He could have saved them. He could save anyone he wants to. That makes God out to be like the priest and the Levite that saw the man who had fallen among thieves on the road to Jericho.

And instead of helping him, he says, I don't think I'll do it this time. Here's somebody who needs help. Here's somebody who needs to be loved.

And the Samaritan does it, but the priest and the Levite don't. And what was so wrong with their behavior? They just passed by and didn't decide to do anything for him. Isn't that what God has done, according to Calvinism? He sees a whole race of people lost, and he doesn't do anything for most of them? For some of them he will, but not most of them.

That's a strange picture of God. It certainly isn't the picture Jesus painted or anywhere else in the Bible, frankly. It's Augustine's picture.

It took 400 years for this doctrine to come into the church. I was debating Doug Wilson up in Idaho on Calvinism, and one of the deacons in his church came up to me and says, does it bother you, Steve, that your view is not held by any of the great modern or great historic Protestant commentators? Well, he's wrong about that. Some commentators do take the Arminian view.

Arminius did, and certainly Adam Clark and some others do, and certainly Wesley did. But I let him have it. I let him have that point.

Okay, so does it bother me that none of the great commentators of Protestantism take my view? I said, well, let me ask you this. Does it bother you that none of the Christians in the world took your view until 400 A.D.? Yeah, 400 A.D. That's 400 years of not knowing something as important as what they think Calvinism is important. And what they say is their answer, they admit this is true.

I mean, any knowledgeable Calvinist knows this is true, that Augustine invented Calvinism. But they would say, they actually think Paul taught it, but it wasn't discovered until Augustine, 400 years later. Well, the problem here is they say in the first three centuries of Christianity, they were fighting out Christological heresies.

You know, the Nicea and these early councils, they were talking about Christological controversies. They didn't have time to figure out some of these things. And once they got that settled, they figured out the election thing.

So it takes 400 years to come up with a, if this is a major doctrine of Scripture, how did these church fathers who all read the Scripture in the original language, because that was their native tongue, Greek, they couldn't see any of these doctrines. For 400 years? I have only lived less than 100 years. And I have worked out my eschatology, I've worked out my soteriology, I've worked out my, you know, my Christology.

I mean, frankly, in less than 100 years, I myself have been able to work from the Scripture out what I believe about these things. And why would the church take 400 years to do that? And if for the first 400 years they didn't know these things, could these things possibly be very important if they're true? Why would God let the church be ignorant of these things? Why would they be so obscure if they're important? Well, the truth is the Bible doesn't teach these things, and it took a Manichean, that's what Augustine was before he was a Christian, he was a Manichean, a Neoplatonist philosopher. Became a Christian, he mixed his Neoplatonism with Christianity and came up with some doctrines that no one had ever accepted before in the church, which I believe are mistakes, but Calvinists don't think they're mistakes.

So this unconditional election, the T is total depravity, the U is for unconditional election. The election of who's going to be saved has got to be done unconditionally on God's part. The L is limited atonement.

Now, sometimes they like to call this particular redemption instead. The atonement is what Jesus accomplished for sinners on the cross. The Calvinists believe that Jesus only died for the elect.

He didn't die for all people. Now, this is not too shocking, although I would have had trouble with it when I was younger if someone had presented it to me that starkly, but here's how they see it. God doesn't love and doesn't want to save anyone except the elect.

If he wanted to, he'd save them all. He only saves the elect, so why would he have Jesus die for anyone other than the elect? They sometimes even bring out where Jesus is praying in John chapter 17, where he says, Father, I do not pray for the world, I pray for these that you have given me. And they say, if Jesus wouldn't even pray for the non-elect, why would he die for the non-elect? Now, of course, they're really going crazy on that one.

They're not exegeting at all. Jesus is referring to that particular prayer for the unity and the sanctity of his people and their protection. He says, I'm not praying this for the world, I'm praying this for my people.

Yeah, but on other occasions, he did pray for non-elect. Like when he was on the cross, he said, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they do. They didn't all come to Christ.

He prayed for them, though. Certainly not everyone at the foot of the cross was elect. The ones who crucified him, the Sanhedrin and so forth, he prayed for them.

Yeah, Jesus prayed for the non-elect, and he loves the non-elect. He's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, according to 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 8 or 9. And yet, they say, well, he only loves and only wants to save the elect, so he only died for the elect. Now, here's the difference in their idea of what Jesus did when he died.

When Jesus died, God already knew who was going to be saved, the elect, and only wanted them saved. So Jesus actually procured their salvation. In a sense, when he died, they were saved.

Now, if he died for all men, we have to say he only died potentially for their salvation. We would have to say that he only made salvation available to all, but he didn't procure it and make it happen for anyone in particular. So the non-Calvinist view, which I hold, is that Jesus' death did make salvation universally available, but did not guarantee the

salvation of any particular individuals.

Everyone gets to make a choice about that. Calvinism says that's a weak atonement. That's a limited atonement.

It's limited in its power. They say our atonement is unlimited in its power. It reaches those for whom Jesus died, and it brings them in and makes them saved.

But this is just a different view of what the atonement accomplishes. It's very clear many times in Scripture that Jesus tasted death for all men, and that he's the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world, John said in 1 John 2. There's lots of passages about God desires all men to be saved. He's not willing that any should perish.

He died for all. He's a ransom for all, the Bible says in 1 Timothy 2. There's lots of references to all. But what the Calvinist says, when it says all or all men, it means all the elect men.

Now if their doctrine is true, then it must mean that, because if Jesus only died for the elect, then all these verses that don't say that must mean that. And one wonders if, in fact, they mean that, why don't any of them say that? Why is there so many references to all men, and none of them mean all men? They mean all the elect men. That's a rather strange way to give us a Bible, to say things that we're not supposed to believe.

We're not supposed to believe the way they're said. We're supposed to read into them things that our late coming doctrines, that arrived with Augustine, insist upon them being there. So that's a limited atonement.

Then there's an irresistible grace. Irresistible grace is the idea that if you are one of the elect, God's grace will draw you irresistibly. You will not fail to come to Christ.

You will repent. Well, of course, because God just unilaterally gives you life. Unilaterally gives you repentance, gives you faith.

What choice do you have in that? If you're elect, you will inevitably be drawn to Christ. And so that also leads to the fifth one, perseverance of the saints. Perseverance of the saints means if you're one of the elect, you will persevere in faith.

You won't just express faith at some point in your life and then walk away. If you're one of the elect, you'll express faith, and you'll live that faith, persevering to death. In fact, this is a very strong assertion.

They say that if you seem to be saved and to serve God for, let's say, 30, 40 years of your life, maybe your whole life, from childhood until you're old, and then you fall away just before you die and you renounce God, you never were saved. Because if you were,

you'd stay saved. You'd persevere.

If you do not hold fast until death, then you are not one of the elect. Now, it's interesting because sometimes Calvinists say, you know, without Calvinism, we'd have no assurance of salvation. I'd say with Calvinism, we have no assurance of salvation.

With Calvinism, I can't know if I'm saved until I breathe my last breath and I didn't fall away. I guess I'm saved. Because according to them, I can have every evidence of being a Christian.

I can be myself persuaded that I'm a Christian, and everyone else can be persuaded I'm a Christian, and this for decades, even for my whole life perhaps, but if I fall away and renounce Christ at the end, under torture, let us say, well, then I never really was saved. But if I wasn't really saved, then how can anyone know if they're saved at all? I know people who served God for 20 and 30 years and then fell away, and their service to Christ was as convincing as mine. They seemed to love God.

They were passionate for God. They led others to Christ. They experienced deliverance from drug addictions and other things in their life miraculously.

The work of God in their life was as persuasive as, frankly, the work of God in the lives of many people who I have no doubt that they're Christians. In fact, I have no doubt that those people were Christians either, but they fell away. But if Calvinism is true, they weren't Christians even during those times when everything pointed that direction.

And if they let themselves go logically on this, they have to say, therefore, all the things that make me seem like a Christian might be equally deceptive. I may not really be one. Now, I know very few Calvinists who are humble enough to admit this.

They say, no, I know I'm saved. But those people who fell away, they said they knew they were saved too. Oh, yeah, but they really didn't.

But they said they did. Yeah, well, they didn't, obviously, because they weren't saved. They were fakes.

Well, how do you know that? Because their doctrine requires it. But I have a friend who's a Reformed pastor in Grangeville, Idaho, a good friend of mine, one of my closest friends in Grangeville. He's a pastor of a Reformed church, and we used to get together for breakfast almost every day to debate Calvinism.

And he's one of the few that I've known among Calvinists who said he's not really sure if he's saved and that he can't really know until the day of his death. He can hope for it. He has evidence of it.

I have no doubt that he's saved. He's a very godly man. But he knew that his doctrine

did not allow him reasonably and logically to know for sure if he was saved until he persevered to the end.

Now, there's another version of that, which is more what I learned as a Baptist, which wasn't really perseverance of the saints, wasn't really the Calvinist doctrine, but there's a once-saved-always-saved doctrine that you sometimes hear, where, you know, someone lived their life for the devil and died drunk and in a violent accident or something like that, but someone says, ah, but they accepted Christ when they were five years old, so they're in heaven now. You know, they accepted Christ when they were five, never lived a day for Christ, lived for the devil their whole life, and died for, you know, serving the devil, but they're saved because they got saved once-saved-always-saved. You got saved when you were five, you're always saved.

Well, there are people who believe that. Calvinists don't. Calvinists would say that person never was saved, and he proved it by his life.

He did not persevere in faith and obedience to Christ. Calvinists and Arminians agree about one thing. If you die apostate, you're lost.

If you die an unbeliever, you're lost. The Calvinists would say you never were a believer, and Arminians might say, well, you might have been, but you aren't anymore. But, see, Calvinists and Arminians have that in common.

The person who dies without faith is lost, whereas the Baptists that I grew up among would say, well, if they had faith when they were a kid, they gave their life to Christ when they were 16 years old, never really stuck, but, you know, God's grace covers. Well, certainly that is not taught in Scripture. But we now know what the five points of Calvinism are, and if you have true total depravity, then election must be unconditional, because no conditions can be met.

And if God has unconditionally chosen who he's going to save, and no others can be saved, then Jesus would only die for those to save them. And they would be irresistibly drawn to God, because God is going to unilaterally put it in them to come to him. And they will persevere to the end, because, again, they are electing God, God put it in them to come, he'll put it in them to stay.

So this is what the Calvinism doctrine teaches. Now, I'm going to end this here, but I want to just ask some practical questions. What practical ramifications are there of this doctrine? Well, I've already mentioned one of them.

If you really take Calvinism's point seriously, you cannot have assurance of salvation until you die, or at least until you're about to die, because even if everything about your life pointed to you being a true Christian, if you happen to fall away at the last moment before you die, it's not just that you lose it, you never were in it. None of those evidences

that you're a Christian were valid, though everyone thought they were, and you thought they were. And, you know, that seems to me a sad thing, because the Bible says, for example, Jesus said, Whosoever hears my words and believes on him that sent me has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life.

That's already happened. I can know that. I'm supposed to be able to know that.

John said in 1 John 5.13, These things I've written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. How? Because I believe. Well, I always believe.

Well, I don't know for sure, but I have eternal life now. While I am believing, I'm connected to Christ by my faith, and that life is in him, and in him I have eternal life. John says that also in 1 John 5. I think it's verse 10 or 11.

He says, This is the message that God has given to us, eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that has the Son has life. He that does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So the life is in Jesus. Eternal life is in Jesus. If I am in him, I have it.

If I am not in him, I don't. And Jesus indicated there's a danger of not remaining in him once you are there. He says, I'm the vine, you're the branches.

Every branch that remains in me will bear fruit, but if any man does not remain in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withered, and they gather them and burn them. How do you remain in Christ? You remain in Christ by having a relationship with Christ, a relationship where he's your Lord, where your trust is in him, and your obedience is toward him. Are you perfect in obedience? No, nobody's perfect in obedience.

The apostles weren't. If they weren't, I don't think we are. But our decision that governs our life is to be obedient to him.

We fall short. We stumble at times. But we are determined to follow Jesus.

As long as your determination is to follow Jesus, you're still abiding in him. And no matter how many times you've failed and fallen and tripped and fallen, it doesn't matter how many times it is. Some people say, well, if you could lose your salvation, how many times can you sin before you lose it? How many sins does it take to lose your salvation? It doesn't take any number of sins.

It takes one, which is apostasy. It takes the sin of giving up on Jesus. If you give up on Jesus, it's like a marriage.

How many sins can you commit against your wife before you're not married to her anymore? Well, if she's infinitely forgiving and wants to stay in the marriage, and you

want to stay in the marriage, you're still married. No matter how much you fall short. But it only takes one sin to end a marriage, and that's a divorce.

To say, I'm not in this anymore. I'm done. And there are people who come to that point with God.

I'm done with you, God. I'm really disappointed with you. You didn't do what I thought you were going to do.

You let my child die. You let my wife die. I'm done with God.

Well, you're done then. How many sins does it take to lose your salvation? Just the one. And yet you can commit hundreds or thousands of sins, out of weakness, in the course of your lifetime, and not lose your salvation, because you're still clinging to Christ.

You're still depending on his mercy. You become a Christian by an act of your will. And this is not something that Calvinism believes.

Calvinism does not believe that you become a Christian by an act of the will. You become a Christian by an act of God's will. He takes you when you're dead, makes you alive, and then makes you want him.

Now, this is a very controversial point I want to make, and very offensive to Calvinists. I hope not to anybody else. But what if a young man wants to persuade a young woman to sleep with him? And she says no.

And she consistently says no, because she hates him. But then he slips her a roofie, a date rape drug. Suddenly her will has changed.

She's compliant. She goes along with it. He gets what she wants.

They have a relationship now. Well, how did that happen? He didn't win her. He changed her against her will.

Because before he changed her will, she didn't want him. And according to Calvinism, before God makes you want him, you hate him. That means that the elect are people who hated him before he regenerated them.

But his unilateral act of regenerating them forced them, against their will, to love him. Now Calvin says, no, it's not against their will. He changes their will.

Yeah, so did the guy who gave the girl a roofie. Changed her will too. She would not have made that decision if she was asked.

According to Calvinism, an unregenerate person, if asked, do you want to follow Jesus Christ, would say no. So God just has to force it on them. And of course, I said it's

offensive to Calvinist, but find a problem with that analogy.

I mean a logical problem with it. I don't see one. A couple of ramifications.

Calvinism does not allow you to tell anybody that God loves them. Because you don't know if they're elect or not. A very well-known Calvinist writer named J. Adams wrote a book called *Competent to Counsel* back around 1970.

And in it, he's talking about in counseling somebody, don't ever tell them that God loves them. Or that Jesus, he said, don't ever tell them that God, that Jesus died for them. Because you don't know if he did.

You don't know if they're the elect or not. You can't give anyone that assurance. Don't tell anyone that Jesus died for them.

Don't tell anyone that God loves them. I made this point on a recording years ago, and James White dealt with it on his program once. And he played me saying, you know, if Calvinism is true that you can't tell anyone that God loves them.

He said, that's right. You can't. We don't know who God loves and who he doesn't love.

We can't tell anyone God loves them. Well, that certainly changes the message, doesn't it? What can you tell them? Jesus died for them? No, you don't know if he died for them. Jesus loves them? Well, you don't know if he does.

What do you know? You can just tell them, you know, Jesus died for the sins of the world. And if they're elect, they'll receive it, I guess. I mean, God will make them receive it.

But there's all kinds of information the Bible tells us about God's love for the world and so forth, that we can't affirm if Calvinism is true. And if I don't know that God loves anyone in particular, I only know he loves some people, some nebulous group called the elect, I don't know who's in it, who's out. If I don't know that he loves anyone in particular, I don't know if he loves me in particular.

There's no way to know. I have to wait and see if I die faithful or not. But I have to live my life now if I'm consistent, Calvinist or not.

They, you know, they love the consistency of their system, but they're not consistent in their reasoning. If Calvinism is true, you can't know until you die that you will persevere, because some people don't. Some people who appear very much to be Christian in every respect do not persevere, and that means they weren't saved according to Calvinism, and therefore, maybe I'm one of them, unless I'm just too arrogant to allow that I could be one of them.

Only arrogance could make me think that, because, you know, other people are. Why am I immune to self-deception? So, these are concerns I have with the ramifications of

Calvinism, and, of course, the character of God, I think, is impugned in Calvinism, because it makes him out to be a God who, though he could save everybody, he really would rather not. He'd rather let the vast majority of people that he created, who never asked to be born, go to hell and be tormented there forever.

They didn't ask to be born. God, in his sovereign decrees, just decided he could glorify himself by making a bunch of people who would be evil and then showing how just he is by tormenting them. Is that really a demonstration of justice? Some people think so.

I'm not among them. But, fortunately, I mean, I would have to think that. I would have to think that if Calvinism is true.

Fortunately, it isn't. The Bible does not teach Calvinism. I know every verse they use, and I discuss every verse they use in my series on Calvinism.

It's called God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation. Twelve lectures, I give every proof text for Calvinism. I point out what the Calvinists say about it.

I quote them, and then I go over it, and I say, here's what it says in context. It's not saying what they're saying, and it isn't. Calvinists are not very good exegetes.

And this is an interesting thing, too, because when I first heard of James White, it was an article he wrote about Calvinism. He said, Calvinism is, if nothing else, it's an exegetical position. I think that is not what I find when I read the writers.

I don't find them exegeting the scripture. Exegesis means you have to take it in context. You have to bring out the meaning that's intended by the author, not the one that you're reading into it.

You can't add qualifiers and words that the author never thought to put in there, apparently. Calvinism is an eisegetical position, which is why it took 400 years for anyone to add to the scriptures those ideas that aren't there, but which were in Manichaeism, which were in Greek philosophy, and which a former Manichaean Greek philosopher, Christian Augustine, introduced. There's reasons why, actually, one point that I'm going to give you.

Augustine could not read Greek. He said so. He did not read Greek.

He was a Latin father. He read a Latin Bible, translated from Greek to Latin, called the Vulgate, translated by Jerome. The church fathers before him who rejected the ideas that he offered, they were the Greek fathers who actually read and spoke from their mother's breasts.

They learned Greek. It was the same language the New Testament was written in. They read the New Testament in Greek and never came up with any of these ideas.

Now, a lot of Calvinists say, well, as you analyze the Greek, you'll get these ideas out. Then how come the people who spoke Greek as their native language didn't get those ideas out, and it took someone who didn't read Greek and only read Latin to get those ideas? Come on. This is not an intellectual, honest position.

I'm not saying the people are not honest. I think they haven't thought it through. It takes a long time to think through all these things, I'm sure.

But that is the brief synopsis of Calvinism from my point of view. And if someone is interested in looking into every scripture Calvinists use, I treat those in my series, God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation. It takes a little more time to listen to, though.