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What Does It Matter?



God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg addresses the controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism and argues that a person does not necessarily become a better Christian by holding the opposing view. He suggests that while theology provides a foundation for living a good life, it should not be viewed as contradictory to true realities or used to justify controversial doctrines or behaviors. Gregg also challenges the notion that God only loves the elect and expresses the importance of empathy and compassion towards sinners.

Transcript

All right, this is the final lecture in our series on God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation, and of course, it's been a focus very largely on the Calvinistic teaching on these subjects and examining them from a person unpersuaded of them. I'm not a Calvinist. That would make me an Arminian in the parlance of most Calvinists, though again, it's not so much that I have a positive affection for Arminianism, the truth is I'm not that familiar with Arminianism.

I haven't read him that much. The question here is whether the Calvinist views are scriptural or not. And so, I'm not coming at this as a partisan trying to prove Arminianism to be true and against some rival.

It's rather that Calvinism is a very well-known, and in our day, perpetrated by some very important, vocal, widely read teachers. And our lectures have essentially, we have used the word Arminian, and as I mentioned at the beginning of the lecture series, I may slip into doing so, and I don't try very hard not to. But I'm really talking about non-Calvinists, that is to say, whether I'm Arminian or not, whether I have anything to do with Arminianism's views.

I believe the Calvinist views misrepresent what the Bible teaches. And so, in some sense, this has been a negative enterprise, to look at the Calvinist arguments and then to show that they're not the correct interpretation of scripture. But it hasn't been entirely negative, because as you know, we looked at the scriptures favoring Calvinism, then we

critiqued them, that was the negative part.

And then we also would show positively what it seems to me that the Bible teaches on these points. So, this is what we've done in the past several sessions. I think there's probably been 11 of them, if I'm not mistaken.

And we're now on lecture 9. Some of those lectures take more than one session. This one should not. This is, I expect, to be probably the shortest of the sessions, because we're not going to be examining long lists of scriptures and trying to show what they do and don't say anymore.

We did that in the previous lectures. This lecture is called, What Does It Matter? In other words, who cares about these things? And I will say that at one level, I don't think it matters too much, with reference to certain things. For example, how I live my life, or whether I encourage other people to be saved, or whether I think it necessary to persevere.

If I were persuaded of Calvinism, I'd be, in a sense, in the same position as I am as a non-Calvinist. Calvinists and non-Calvinists believe that people need to persevere to the end. They need to believe in Christ.

They need to repent of their sins. They need to live holy lives. Both sides believe these, and these are, of course, the most practical things about which Christians need to be concerned.

And I've always felt that a person can be a good Christian and a Calvinist. In fact, I know it, because I know many good Christians who are Calvinists. And some of them have been... I've been a great admirer of many of them.

I'm a great admirer of Charles Spurgeon. I'm a great admirer of George Mueller. I'm a great admirer of the Puritan writers.

And that's not an exhaustive list. There's many writers who I've gained from. I've read their books, their commentaries, and been blessed and learned from them certain things.

They were Calvinists, although in many cases their Calvinism was not a feature of their treatment of some subject we're discussing. But they happened to be Calvinists, and I think very highly of them. I've always felt, when it comes to controversial doctrines or issues of controversy, that if a person can hold the opposite view than from what I hold, and still be a better Christian than me, that doctrine must not be hurting them too much.

As long as someone can walk with Jesus Christ, and do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God, then whatever views they're holding aren't damaging them too much. And there are many controversies like that. There are many controversies that

Christians think differently about.

They have to do with eschatology, they have to do with soteriology like this controversy, which is the doctrine of salvation, how people are saved, and so forth. And yet, although people strongly disagree and interpret certain things very differently from each other, and in some cases may never come to agreement, they can walk together, because they're walking with God. And there's no reason, and I've held this for almost forever, there's no reason to believe that Calvinists and Arminians can't be in the same church, that they can't fellowship together, that they can't be in the same family, at the same table.

Why? Why would that be a problem? If they love Jesus, if they're walking with God, if they're living obediently to God, which is entirely possible for Calvinists and Arminians to do, how could their views on these subjects really be a problem? They don't have to be. But in some ways, they don't have to be, because not everyone lives consistently by what they profess to believe. That is to say, some people live better than their beliefs would cause them to live.

Some people are just good people with wrong ideas, and they haven't really worked through the practical implications of their ideas enough to realize that their good behavior or their convictions about things don't necessarily, they're not necessarily called forth from the particular concepts that they embrace. The reason they walk well is because they know Jesus. And people who know Jesus can be wrong about many subjects, including this subject, and they can still walk with Jesus.

But when that is the case, when you're living exactly as you should, but your beliefs are wrong in some significant area, it means that in some way you're living above the level of the quality of your beliefs. And really, it's good to bring your beliefs into conformity with the right conduct, because then you have a theological foundation for right conduct. You know, when Paul wrote his letters, very commonly, he divided his letters into at least two sections, sometimes three.

Colossians and Ephesians and Romans, for example, are examples of letters that are broken into two major sections. The first section theological, the second one practical. Sometimes he would spend half of the epistle giving theological concepts, and the other half the practical principles.

That's true in Ephesians and Colossians. Ephesians has six chapters. The first three are theological.

The last three are practical, instruction, how to live. Colossians has four chapters. The first two are theological.

The last two are practical. Galatians has three sections. The first section is

autobiographical.

Paul's giving us information about himself. But then the second section, which is two chapters, is theological, and the last two chapters practical. Romans actually has 11 chapters that are theological, and a much smaller portion that's practical.

But he packs a lot into chapter 12 and 13 in his practical teaching. I mean, chapter 12 probably says as many practical things as any whole book of the Bible that Paul wrote otherwise, because apparently he ran low on parchment, because he went long on the theology, so he crammed in a lot of practical instruction at the end. But you see this approach.

Give the theology first, which is the basis for the practical. In fact, Paul makes it very clear after he's given his theological treatise in Romans 1 through 11, in chapter 12, verse 1, where the practical part says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, that you do the number of things he then exhorts. Notice, I beseech you therefore, that is in light of what we've been saying in these first 11 chapters.

You see, the Christian life is a life of action, a life of behavior, but it stems from a rationale in theology, a rationale in what we understand to be true about God, and Christ, and salvation. So obviously, though people manage to live a good life, sometimes with bad theology, they do so in spite of their bad theology. Christianity ideally means we live a good life because of our theology, because our theology provides a foundation from which such living naturally would spring, and by which such living would be justified.

Now, I won't go over the reasons again in detail now, but as we've gone through the points of Calvinism, I've made it very clear that there are certain points of Calvinism, which if they are true, they don't seem to make sense of Christian behavior. It would seem to be that warning people not to fall away, for example, doesn't make a lot of sense, since in Calvinism they either must or must not, and it has little to do with your exhortations to them. It has to do with whether God decreed something before any of us were born about them.

And that's sort of an example of how a theological concept doesn't really, it doesn't make sense that you would have to warn people if that concept is true, and yet Calvinists do warn people. So they do the right thing, it's just that the right thing in such a case doesn't seem to be called for by what their theology teaches. Now, any Calvinist that listens to these lectures will say, oh, Steve, you just don't understand our theology.

Well, I've been trying for a long time, believe me, I've been trying. I've been reading the best Calvinists I can find, the old ones and the new ones. The popularizers and the weighty, thick theological discourse writers.

William Gurnall, who writes 1,300 pages, and R.C. Sproul, who writes Popular Calvinism. And if I don't understand the theology yet, then I'm either of much, I'm very much below average intelligence, or not being below average intelligence, I'm reading authors who don't know how to make themselves understood to people of at least average intelligence. I don't know which it is.

But my assumption is that Calvinism has to plead that no one understands them correctly, and that their theology is full of mysteries, because they're getting something fundamentally wrong. That there are fundamental contradictions involved in the theology. And they recognize the problem, they refuse to call it a contradiction, because they believe their theology is true.

And the thing that seems to contradict it, they believe is true also. And they figure, well, it can't be contradictory, because that means something's false here. So we just, how they go together is a mystery.

And so they appeal to mystery, rather than questioning whether the theological propositions that run them into a controversy, or into a contradiction, maybe need to be re-examined. Anyone who loves the truth should be very skeptical of any belief system that involves them in what appears to be a contradiction. Because truth does not contradict itself.

And if my theology was continually running up in a way against other realities, in a way that appears to be contradictory, it may be that it's a mystery, or it may be that the theology is wrong, and perhaps the theology should be re-examined and modified to go along with what is true. And in my opinion, Calvinists believe what they do, not because they're unintelligent. Clearly, they're very intelligent, many of them.

Some of the greatest intellects of the Church have been Calvinists. However, none of the early ones were. None of the first four centuries' intellects in the Church were Calvinists.

Augustine was the first intellectual in the Church to become a Calvinist, and he did so because he was a Greek philosopher. He was a Neoplatonist. Even Calvinists admit that he was a Neoplatonist.

So, it seems suspicious to me that intellectuals would follow an intellectual who introduced theology by merging Greek philosophy with Christianity and came up with a product that no Christian, intellectual or otherwise, had ever come up with for 400 years before that. It is certainly possible that Augustine was the first person to really understand what Paul wrote or what Jesus said, and that all those Christian fathers really didn't. I won't say that that's an impossible thing to consider, but when you look at his theology and find that it is so scripturally weak that it depends on so much eisegesis, so much reading into passages, words and concepts that come from the theology but don't come from the Bible, like eternal decrees, and all men mean always all elect men, and

some of these insertions that have to be made in dozens of passages in order to make it work, it's fair enough to say, well, you know, maybe the Church fathers were right, and maybe what Augustine gave us, as respected as it has been ever since, isn't really an improvement over what the Church fathers knew the gospel to be and the meaning of these subjects to be.

And so, obviously, I personally think that we should not be overly impressed by the fact that lots of Calvinists are leading Christian thinkers. That's never been otherwise, well, until, except before Augustine. But, you know, you'll find that people who are leading thinkers aren't always original thinkers.

In fact, they sometimes become leading thinkers by agreeing with the status quo. Those who don't agree with the status quo sometimes are never heard from again. The ones who learn how to articulate the status quo best are the ones who publish lots of books and the Church embraces them and distributes them.

And so, once Augustine made these views, you know, mainstream and orthodox, it may well be that, certainly it is the case that all trained theologians for a long time were trained to be Augustinian. And no matter how smart a man is, if his training inclines him all in one direction, not all men are smart enough, even if they're very brilliant, to realize that they should question even their professors, even if all of their professors are saying the same thing. Because all their professors may be products of what their professors taught them, who are products of what their professors taught them, and sometimes you don't go back, don't even think to go back and say, where did these professors first get these ideas? All we know is that these professors make some cases from a lot of Bible verses that sound like, sounds pretty good when they make the case, as long as you don't cross-examine too closely.

But it really doesn't, it's not safe to trust that somebody who's theologically trained and respected necessarily is a clear thinker, or an original thinker, or has any motivation at all to rethink what is considered to be orthodoxy. One thing I've pointed out in many situations, not with reference to Calvinism, but just in general, about people in ministry and trained ministry, is that when people are trained in the ministry, when they have theological training, they are trained in some theological system. You go to theological college, your professors hold some kind of theological system, and that's what they're going to train you in.

And unless you are extremely rebellious or skeptical, you're probably going to learn how to repeat it. That's how you pass your tests, that's how you graduate, and that's how you get a job in the organization that hires people from that institution. That's how you get a job as a pastor, in a denomination, by agreeing with the denomination.

And although I'm not saying that pastors who get trained in Calvinism and perpetuate it, I'm not saying they're dishonest. I'm saying in many cases, they've had no reason to

want to question whether it's true or not. Everyone in their circle, everyone they admire, everyone who trained them, going back generations, everybody in their church holds these views.

Why should I rock the boat? Now, I do believe that many men are trained in Calvinism, and yet they do rock the boat. They finally say, I don't believe this anymore. This is not what I find in scripture.

And then they leave. But again, in many cases, they're blackballed. Robert Shank is an example.

He was a Baptist, a Reformed guy. He left Calvinism, and he was treated very, very badly by his denomination. He kicked out, and so forth.

And that means the status quo continues, despite the fact that once in a while, you find someone who thinks enough to say, well, hey, wait a minute here. Well, many times, institutions don't want people saying, hey, wait a minute here. Businesses don't like whistleblowers.

And without trying to be too cynical, the fact is Christian universities, and in many cases, churches, are businesses. How do I know that? They've got a budget. They've got salaries.

They've got organizational leadership, CEOs called pastors, boards of directors called elders. They have real estate. They have a corporation status.

They run like businesses. I'm not saying they're corrupt. I'm just saying you can't, even if a church really is a true body of true believers, seeking to please God and doing the right things, the fact is that most churches, in addition to that, are also businesses.

There's a business aspect. You can get fired. You can dread getting fired.

There are pastors that have, there's two pastors in my circle of acquaintance in the past, who are hired by denominations that are dispensational. That's a different subject than we've been talking about here, but I'm not dispensational and I've taught against it. And two cases I know of, pastors in dispensational churches have listened to my lectures on dispensationalism.

And one told me and one told a friend of mine that the lectures sound persuasive, but they said, I can't believe that because I'm hired by this denomination. I would lose my job. Now you might say, oh, how cynical can you be? That's a corrupt minister.

He's not exactly corrupt, but he's not exactly not a mercenary either. I mean, there's a sense in which he's got a family and kids to support. He's got a mortgage.

He's like any other guy who has a job. He's got a religious job with a religious business.

There are motivations that some people have, even good men who want to serve God, that underlie their objectivity and can prevent them from even wanting to think outside the box.

Why go there? Outside that box is outside my circle of friends, outside my denomination, outside the perimeters of what I'm paid to teach. That's only going to cause trouble. And therefore defending the status quo, there's a strong motivation to conform.

And I just want to say that many men who do have that strong motivation to conform are also very good men. There are men who don't know that there's that motivation. They are persuaded that they are simply going where the Bible goes, but they're reading the Bible through the grid that they were taught to read it through.

And I'm saying all this not to say bad things about Calvinist ministers, because like I said, I admire many Calvinist ministers. Many are great men. What I am saying is you should not be overly intimidated by the fact that many of our favorite teachers are Calvinist.

The fact that they're Calvinist doesn't mean that they, that that view has objectively been considered and critiqued and justified by the best exegesis that a person can have. There may be a reluctance. There may be a neglect of such critical exegesis because there's simply no reason that they'd ever want to conduct it or see the need to.

They're convinced it's right. It's like if you're an evangelical and a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door and they start making arguments, which you recognize, if I believe what they do, I can't be an evangelical anymore. And I know evangelicalism is true.

So to even consider what they're saying is dangerous. If they would persuade me, they're persuading me of error because what I believe is certainly true. So I can't really objectively consider what they're saying because that would lead me into an area that I know to be untrue.

Now, I use the example of Jehovah's Witnesses because I personally can relate with that. I mean, I try to be objective when I listen to them, but there's something in me that says this is not really where I want to go in my theology. Now, I will go there if I must.

I will go there if the Bible requires it, but I don't think it does. I think I've looked into these issues already. I think I'm persuaded justly of my viewpoints.

I think I know what's true. I'm not really probably going to listen to them very objectively. That's just human nature.

And a person who's been trained Calvinist, not everyone they respect is Calvinist, and they think this is Orthodox Christianity from the founding fathers. I mean, there certainly is this presupposition what I believe is true. These Arminians, they challenge it.

They're Pelagians. Pelagians was a heretic. Well, they're semi-Pelagians.

Why should I give them any credit? Why should I even listen to their arguments? What good can come from that? Well, I'm afraid that what I'm saying might sound very unflattering to Calvinists, but I want to tell you the same is true of people of any theological system. It's just the Calvinism that we're talking about now. It's true of any theological system.

People who are not Calvinists, people who are Arminians, who are Wesleyans, might have the same things going on inside of them. I was trained Wesleyan. I can't consider Calvinism seriously, etc., etc.

Now you might say, well, Steve, why would you think you're different than them? Well, I'm not. Essentially, I'm a man, and this is human nature we're talking about. One difference in my circumstance, though, is no one's ever paid me to teach anything in particular.

That's a determination I made when I was young, and I went into ministry when I was 16, 17. I decided I will never be on any payroll, because if you're on a payroll, you're paid to teach what the people who pay you want you to teach. I'd rather be on God's payroll and live by faith.

That way, I only have to teach what God wants me to teach, and if I'm wrong, I can change my mind, and that'll be what God wants me to do. God wants me to change my mind if I'm wrong. If I'm on a payroll of a church, they may not want me to change my mind, even if it's wrong, because that puts me into a different camp than them.

While I don't claim total objectivity, who can? I don't think there is a totally objective human being, and I don't claim to be one, but I at least have managed to avoid the fear of being fired. I've never been hired. You can't fire me.

I haven't been hired. For whatever, the 43 years I've been in ministry, 44 years now, I've been free to study the Bible and change my mind as much as I felt led. It's gotten me into trouble, too, but not so much trouble that I won't keep doing it.

So, I say all that because we've come to the end of a series where we've examined what some of the most respected evangelicals, even respected by us, affirm strongly to be true, and at the end of this, when you're going through the argument, you say, yeah, I think this Arminian, this non-Calvinist, this must be true because these scriptures, you know, Steve's kind of persuasive about this. Well, when it's all over and the persuasive lectures are over, there's going to be a tendency to drift back and say, but if that's true, why does so-and-so believe in Calvinism? Why does so-and-so believe in Calvinism? How can this other thing be true? I'm just saying, just because the majority, even if Christian leaders believe a certain thing, doesn't mean they're correct. Even if they're good men.

Remember, for a thousand years before the Reformation, all Christian leaders were Roman Catholics. Some of them were good men. Not all of them.

There was a lot of corrupt popes and a lot of corrupt bishops and so forth, but there were good ones too, believe it or not. There were monks who were wonderful Christians. Thomas Akempis, Brother Lawrence, Francis of Assisi, wonderful Christian men, but they were Roman Catholic.

In more modern times, Mother Teresa. Who can say she's not a wonderful Christian? I mean, maybe you don't think so. I think she was, and yet she was a Roman Catholic.

I think she was wrong. But for a thousand years, there wasn't any other way Christians thought than Roman Catholic. From the rise of the papacy until the Reformation, approximately a thousand years, all Christians believed doctrines that we now would say were wrong.

This is not a reflection on their character, it's a reflection on how much they were thinking out of the box. Often, those who did think out of the box, during the Middle Ages, of course, ended up being the last thing they were allowed to think in this world. Because the Roman Catholic Church often would hunt them down and torture and then kill them.

We don't have those motivations to stay with the status quo. No one's hunting us down and killing us yet. But the truth is, throughout history, there have been good people who have had reason to just go with the flow and not rock the boat.

And, in my opinion, those who have done so in the Calvinist camp have done so without adequate scriptural justification. That's what I've been trying to show. Now, what does it matter if you're a Calvinist or not? Like I said, in some ways it may not.

You may live exactly the same way for Jesus, whether you're a Calvinist or not, and that's good. As long as it's a good way you're living. You could be a bad person Arminian, a bad person Calvinist.

Or a good person Arminian, or a good person Calvinist. That's not going to determine whether you're good or bad. But it will determine some things.

It seems to me that it clearly does affect some practical areas of our lives. And I've listed four of them that we're going to look at. One of them, it certainly affects our view of God.

It also may, and probably does, influence our view of people. Those are two big categories of important thinking. How do you think about God? How do you think about people? It also, as I've tried to show, may have a very negative impact, if we're consistent in our thinking, negatively on our assurance of salvation.

So how we think about ourselves. And finally, it may have a negative impact on our biblical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a word you might or might not know.

Hermeneutics means the science of interpretation. And it refers to the rules of reasoning from Scripture, the rules of interpreting the Bible. And if we make compromises in our hermeneutics in order to sustain a Calvinist view, you never know where those compromises will end.

Because you either tremble at God's word, like Isaiah said, in which case you won't make compromises for any view's sake. Or else you begin to erode that fear of God. And you begin to be willing to make some eisegesis here and eisegesis there for the sake, for a good cause, to support the major view.

You know, who can fault you for that? You know, you're supporting the truth, so what if you have to twist a little Scripture here and there to do it? The cause is good. And therefore it may affect, without our ever knowing it, our actual honesty in our approach to hermeneutics of the Scripture. And this, of course, I need to be very careful about, because I do believe that when I've debated some Calvinists, they have been guilty of this very thing.

But I'm sure they thought I was. But the point is, I think this business of being Calvinist or not can affect our approach to Scripture in general and our respect for the Scripture and our honesty in interpreting Scripture. So let's start with our view of God.

This shouldn't take very long, but it probably will. Now, first category, our view of God. R.C. Sproul said, and I agree with him completely on this, how we understand the person and character of God the Father affects every aspect of our lives.

You know, A.W. Tozer, who is not a Calvinist, said virtually every problem in the church and in the Christian life can be traced back to a wrong view of God. What kind of God are we worshipping? Well, we know that God loves his children. That's a positive thing.

Just like we love our children, or better. Because Jesus said, if you earthly fathers being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him? He loves us even more than we can love our children. But what about those people who aren't his children? Does he love them or does he not love them? Now, you can often learn a great deal about a person's character by how he treats his enemies.

We admire Abraham Lincoln, for example. Most of us do. Partly because he seemed to be a generous soul.

And he was very good to his enemies. He was even criticized for this by his political friends. They said, you're too nice to your enemies.

To your political enemies. And he said, but I want to be nice to my enemies. They said, in politics you're not supposed to be nice to your enemies.

You're supposed to defeat your enemies. And he said, well if I make my enemies my friends, haven't I defeated my enemies? And I believe that we, you know, lots of the stories about Abraham Lincoln might be apocryphal. And I don't even know that he was a Christian.

Some say he wasn't. And it's not mine to judge. I don't know the man.

And who can, he's become such a legend. It's hard to know how many of the stories about him are strictly true and how many are not. But what we think about him from the stories we've heard is he's a very Christ-like individual.

And one of the things was he had a kind streak toward his enemies. And we consider that to be a very good trait. In fact, if we do, it's because Jesus taught us to see that as a good trait.

Jesus said, love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. Bless those who curse you.

That's how you're supposed to treat your enemies. He said, so you may be like your father in heaven. Okay.

So our father in heaven is best imitated by our being generous to our enemies. Is God our father truly generous to his? How does he feel about sinners? Well, John Calvin, who basically formulated these doctrines in modern times for the reformed movement, may have been a good example of how Calvinism causes people to view God himself. We've certainly seen in some of the quotes from the Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin's book, and even from the Westminster Confession, that God damned certain people to hell out of the good pleasure of his will.

Just to glorify himself, he damned certain people. And judging from history, it looks like the majority of people were not Christians. And so the human race, he took the majority of them and just damned them to hell because that pleased him.

It was according to his good pleasure. That certainly doesn't agree with what the Bible says about God's pleasure. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, Ezekiel said.

But Calvin and Calvinism, especially early Calvinism, thought otherwise. God is not generous toward his enemies. He hates them.

And when you think that about God, it makes you a certain way. If you actually are a worshiper of God, you are likely to become like the God you worship. Because, of course, your idea of what is right and wrong is defined by the way your God is.

If your God is good to sinners, then you'll think it's good to be good to sinners. Because God is. If your God is bad to sinners, then you'll think you should be harsh on sinners.

Because God is. Whatever God is, is by definition what is good. And therefore, whatever you perceive God to be is what you will seek to emulate.

There's a biography of Calvin by Kotret, who describes Geneva, which was the city that Calvin essentially ruled. He didn't hold political office there. He was the pastor there.

But the people who did hold political office were members of his church, and he was like the guru of the whole town. It was Calvin's Geneva. Just to give you some background, Calvin was the city father's, asked Calvin to come to Geneva.

He was a Frenchman, and they were in Switzerland. But they said, Calvin, please come to Geneva. He said, I will only come if you let me set up things the way I want them in the city.

If the city will conform to my plan. They agreed to that, and they made good on it. So that's why when Michael Servetus came and he got burned, Calvin didn't sign the death warrant.

You know, the city fathers did that. That's a political action. He was the pastor of the church, but it was under his influence that they did that.

He was the brains and the heart of Geneva. And everyone pretty much had to do it his way. Cotrette describes Calvin's Geneva as being characterized by an, quote, irrational determination to punish the fomentors of evil, unquote.

And he tells of a man who died, this is a quotation from the biographer, who died under torture in February of 1545 without admitting a crime. And this is one of the criminals that was killed in Calvin's Geneva. But there's some detail about this.

And this comes from, I actually got this from the book *Debating Calvinism*, five points. It says, the body of this man was dragged to the middle of town. Now this man had never been led to confess his crime.

He was accused of something, but went to his grave protesting his innocence. His body was dragged to the middle of the town in order not to deprive the inhabitants of the fine burning they had the right to. Sorcerers like heretics were characterized by their combustible qualities.

The executions continued, yet those detained refused to confess. The tortures were combined skillfully to avoid killing the guilty foolishly. Some were decapitated.

Some committed suicide in the cells to avoid torture. One of the arrested women threw herself from a window. Seven men and 24 women died in the affair.

Others fled. This is a particular roundup of the sinners in town, in Geneva. And Calvin himself wrote a letter to a friend in which he said, quote, the Lord tests us in a surprising manner.

A conspiracy has just been discovered of men and women who for three years employed themselves in spreading the plague in the city by means of sorcery. Fifteen women have already been burned. And the men have been punished still more rigorously.

Twenty-five of these criminals are still shut up in the prisons. This is not something Calvin was complaining about. He was complaining about how they'd come under attack from these sorcerers.

He's saying how we settled the question. We imprisoned them. We burned them.

And we've treated some of them worse than that. This is from the pastor of a church describing how the town runs under his direction. Well, it is consistent with Calvin's view of God.

Why? God hates these people. And we're simply the agents of God's judgment. Now, of course, Jesus and the apostles never followed such policy because I think they didn't see God that way.

I think they saw God being like Jesus. It's very difficult to imagine that Jesus would burn heretics, torture people, drive them to suicide for fear of what he's about to do to them, or instruct civic leaders to do the same to people. That just doesn't look like Jesus because he was a friend of sinners.

Now, the church has become accustomed, of course, to viewing itself as in a conflict with the sinful element of society. We are in a battle. But our battle is not against flesh and blood.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood. We wrestle against principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places. These are demonic powers.

Our battle is against demons, not against their victims. The sinners are simply people who are still held in blindness and captivity by the real enemy, which is Satan. And yet, in many cases, Christians to this day, and some of them the most mainstream American evangelicals, treat sinners, homosexuals, let us say, or other sinners, as if they're the enemy because they think God sees those people as the enemy.

God sees those people, as Jesus put it, sick, needing a physician. A physician is not the enemy of the sick. When Jesus was associated with sinners in too friendly a manner, and he was criticized, he said, those who are well don't need a physician, those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. It's very evident that if Jesus lived in Hollywood or Portland or some other center, or San Francisco, center of homosexual activity, he would not be carrying banners saying, God hates gays. In fact, he'd probably be found in their homes, talking with them.

He's the doctor. You go where the sick people are. And the doctor doesn't go to the sick because he condemns them, he goes because he wants to save them.

Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved, he said in John chapter 3. So, there's a total difference in the view of who God is towards sinners. I believe it is Calvinism primarily that has encouraged a mentality in the church that God hates sinners, and they are his enemies, and therefore, they are our enemies, because we're on God's side. Now, we should be on God's side against sin, against the demonic powers, against the agenda of the devil, but we have to recognize what God recognizes, and these people who are sinners are taken captive by Satan to do his will.

That's what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2.25. They've been taken captive. They're prisoners of war. They're the people that God made in his image to live for his glory, and they've been prevented from that by their deception, by their blindness, by their slavery, and they've been taken captive by Satan to do his will.

We treat them like they're the enemy. They're the victims of the enemy that we also are opposing. Now, when I say victims, this is a very difficult thing to say in a conservative setting.

I'm a conservative myself. We have come to object to the whole language of victimhood, because everybody who does wrong somehow is a victim. My parents abused me.

Society is unfair to me. My PE coach mocked me. Everything I do wrong is someone else's fault.

I'm a victim. I'm a victim. And there is a tendency in our society, our secular society, to see every bit of misbehavior as not responsible misbehavior, sinning, but as victimhood.

And so Christians who see that error, a pendulum swings, a place where we say, to talk about people like that as victims is mealy-mouthed liberalism, political correctness. But Jesus talked about them as victims. If a person is sick, aren't they a victim of disease? If they're taken captive by Satan to do his will, isn't that something to pity them for? We have to recognize that while everybody is responsible to do what is right, those who are not doing what's right are partially doing that because they don't understand.

They're blinded. They're in the dark. They're enslaved.

And while we can't give them a pass, we can't say, oh, you poor thing, we'll just let you

behave that way. We won't interfere. We won't challenge it.

Of course we'll challenge it, but we're challenging it so that we can deliver them from captivity. God is on the sinner's side. This is never illustrated more clearly to me than when I read in Acts chapter 10.

And Peter goes to the household of Cornelius to evangelize. Now, these people are pagans. Now, Cornelius is a God-fearing pagan because he has come to admire the God of Israel.

He has not been circumcised, so he's not really been converted to Israel's religion, but he is definitely very sympathetic toward it. He's what they called in those days a God-fearer. He was not a Christian, and he was not a Jew.

He was a pagan, but he was not attracted to pagan religion. He was attracted to the God of Israel, and he showed it by his behaviors. He prayed to the God of Israel.

He gave alms in order to please God and so forth. Now, yet he was unregenerate. He doesn't know the gospel.

Peter's called to preach to him. Now, I have been raised, since my childhood, interested in evangelism. I've always wanted to lead people to the Lord since I was young, and I read books on evangelism, the typical books.

I've gone to seminars on evangelism because I want to know how to do it. And American evangelicalism has always taught a certain paradigm of evangelism. It sort of is mapped out in the so-called Roman's Road.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you'll confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.

Working through Romans, making the first point is you're a sinner. You've got to know you're a sinner. That's what people think Paul is doing in the first three chapters of Romans.

And since they consider it to be a gospel tract in many cases, they just figure that's what you got to do. You start out by telling people they're sinners. Now, there's a very popular sector of evangelical evangelism today.

I won't name it, but it is teaching people that to evangelize you should go through the Ten Commandments with people because people will not understand that they're sinners unless you go through the Ten Commandments and point out that they have violated God's law. Now, frankly, I think that can be a good thing. However, it becomes almost a

necessity because you've got to prove they're sinners.

You've got to tell them how sinful they are. And the best we do is give them the law. Now, this is what I'm hearing in American evangelicalism.

And basically the message is, sinner, you're in trouble with God. He doesn't like you the way you are. He's not on your side.

So you better find a way to avert his wrath from you. Fortunately, Jesus has come to do that for you. So you need to turn to him.

Because otherwise, God is really, really upset with you. You're sick under his wrath and you've got to get the medicine. Now, you might say, what's wrong with that? Isn't that true? There's a sense in which it's true, but it's not the emphasis that we find necessarily in the evangelism in the New Testament.

And when Peter came to Cornelius' house, he's walking into the house of an unbelieving Gentile. Unbelieving because he's never heard the gospel, but he's still an unbelieving Gentile. And as he walks in, and this passage is in your notes, a little further down on the notes.

I'm not following the outline completely. Under, are all non-Christians godless? Here's some verses from Acts 10, verses 1 through 4. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what is called the Italian regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, Cornelius, your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

So this is how he's introduced. He is then told to send to Joppa, find a man named Peter, and ask him to come and preach. In the meantime, God is appearing to Peter on a rooftop, showing him a vision of unclean animals and saying, eat them.

And Peter said, I don't eat unclean animals, God. And God says, what I call clean, you don't call unclean. Peter was puzzling over that when the messengers from Cornelius came to him and said, a man named Cornelius, a Gentile, wants to talk to you.

An angel appeared to him and said that he should send for you because he wants you to preach to him. And Peter puts it together. The unclean animals that he's told to eat, that's like the unclean Gentiles.

Peter's been remaining aloof from unclean animals. He won't eat them. He's also been remaining aloof from Gentiles because they're unclean to a Jew.

But Jesus says, don't call unclean what I have cleansed. And Peter's learned from that

vision, okay, I can't call these people unclean. But who are we talking about? We're talking about people who are not yet saved.

Cornelius is not yet a Christian. But God has said, don't call him unclean. So Peter comes to the house and this is how he opens his sermon.

This is in Acts 10 verses 34 through 36. Peter says to Cornelius, in truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him. Then he begins to preach.

The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ. He's Lord of all. Now, I've read that dozens, if not scores of times in my life.

But it wasn't until I read it probably a hundred times that I read it and saw, wait a minute. If I was sent to Cornelius' house with my training in evangelism by American evangelical standards, I wouldn't start by saying God likes you. I'd have to start by saying God's angry at you.

You're evil. You're a sinner. Don't you know the trouble you're in with God? Peter gives the opposite message.

You know, I used to think that way about people like you. I used to think I shouldn't associate with people like you. But you know what? God has shown me that people like you, people of every nation who fear God and do His right, are accepted by Him.

You don't start preaching the gospel to someone telling them they're accepted. The strategy I learned was to tell them they're not accepted. They have to make a great deal of changes, including become a Christian, to be accepted.

But Peter starts by saying, God has shown me that everyone in every nation who fears God and does what is right is accepted. Now, obviously, accepted doesn't mean saved because he still had to preach to Him to get saved. He had to preach about Jesus.

And he had to come to Jesus. He had to believe in Jesus to be saved. But before he was saved, his behavior was acceptable behavior.

And I was told that nothing Gentiles do, nothing pagans do, before they're Christians can be acceptable to God. They're nothing but sin. And I thought it's interesting that Peter didn't have the same approach to evangelism that I did and that I was taught.

And I actually thought that would be outrageous to evangelize that way today. You go to a sinner's house and the first thing he says, you know, God accepts you. God likes what you've been doing.

And I would have called you unclean yesterday, but God told me not to call anything unclean, that he's cleansed. And that means you. Now, in starting the message by

saying, you're unclean and need to get cleansed, he says, in this case, you're clean.

But being clean isn't enough. You need to follow Jesus too. Because it's not just all about doing good works and having God think you're nice.

You really need to follow his son. Because that's the command from God, is to follow Jesus as your Lord. And so Cornelius did.

All I'm saying is, I've made a lot of assumptions with my evangelical training in America, and there's a lot more cultural American evangelicalism in our assumptions than we may realize. When I read the Bible and see how the apostles acted, how they communicated, what they assumed and did not assume, I find that they didn't appear to be Calvinists. They thought God was a friend of sinners.

They thought God loved sinners. They thought God so loved sinners that he'd send his son to die for them. God is on the side of sinners.

He hates their sin, it's true, but he's on their side. And yet Calvinism makes it sound like there's an awful lot of sinners that God is not at all on their side. He's predestined them to go to hell and burn forever, and give them no opportunity to do otherwise because it's going to glorify him to burn them.

Is that the kind of God that's in the Bible? It's the kind of God that Calvinism teaches. Is that the kind of God that Calvinists think they teach? Sometimes they act like it isn't. There are Calvinists who write books saying, no, God is a merciful God, he loves sinners, but they don't realize they're saying the opposite of what they say when they discuss their theology.

So if a person is a consistent thinker and holds Calvinist views, it's going to affect the way they think about God. They'll probably act more like Calvin did. Let's burn those witches.

Let's kill those sinners. Let's burn Servetus. Anyone who isn't tolling the line and doesn't give evidence to us that they're one of the elect, let's treat them the way we think God will, and hate them like God does.

It raises questions, of course. Does God really love our unsaved friends and family? There's something that Thomas Talbot wrote in his book, *The Inescapable Love of God*, that I actually quoted in my book on hell, but it fits well here. He said, if I truly love my daughter as myself, then God cannot love or will the good for me unless he also loves or wills the good for her.

For I am not an isolated monad whose interests are distinct from those of my loved ones. And neither is anyone else. If God should do less than his best for my daughter, he would also do less than his best for me.

And if he should act contrary to her best interests, he also acts contrary to my own. Now, what this comes down to, he's arguing for us a different point than we're making here specifically, but what he is arguing is that God loves all sinners. And if he didn't, he doesn't love our children, our parents and grandparents who are sinners.

And how can he love me and elect me for salvation and not elect my children? How could it be said he loves me when I love my children and my happiness hangs on the well-being of my children and other loved ones and friends? If I love them and God doesn't, how can it be said that he really loves me? How can it be said he's doing the best thing for me as a child of his? Not that he's obligated to. We're not arguing that he's obligated to. We're arguing that he claims that he is doing that for us.

He does love us. He's doing everything. All things work together for good for us, he says.

But if my daughter, as Talbot says, or son or parent or dearest friend, if God has said, you know, I don't think I want them. I think I'll send them to hell and burn them. That's just, I'm going to predestine them for that.

How can that be a loving? How can that work together for my good when their pain is my pain and their misery is mine? You see, if God doesn't love everybody, it's hard to know how it could be said that he really loves us because we are told to love everybody. If we do it, then we hurt when other people hurt. It's the irony is that there's a certain conclusion you can't help but draw from Calvinism that God certainly doesn't love everybody and that may be including some of the people we love.

He may not love some of the people that we love and whose happiness is tied to our happiness. Yet, I mean, fortunately the Bible doesn't teach the Calvinistic concept of God. But if he did, we'd have to say, okay, God, you don't really, you and I are on a really different wavelength here even though I'm a Christian, even though I supposedly have the mind of Christ, the Bible says, even though I've been transformed by the renewing of my mind, even though these things are true of me and I'm on your side, we're really on a different wavelength here, God, because I really would have all these people say, frankly, you taught me to want that.

You taught me to love these people. But you apparently don't love them the way that I would. You apparently don't love them the way that you told me to love them.

I mean, it makes God out to be, frankly, it makes God out to be not a really, either not a good person or just not a real person at all. I sometimes think that many people's view of God is missing the personal element. I mean, it's a statement of their theology that God is a personal God.

But it's a statement of their theology, but they don't really think of him as like a real person would be. He's more like, he's a collection of theological propositions. Their God

is more like the collocation of theological statements that you can make about divinity.

One of which is he's got to be absolutely sovereign in the sense that Calvinism teaches. That's just a concept they have to have in God. But then that leads away from God having any personal emotions or personal interaction or personal, frankly, character that would resemble even the best character that he told us to exhibit.

So I think Calvinism has a negative effect on one's view of God. That doesn't mean they don't love God. That doesn't mean they don't love Jesus.

But it may mean that they love him although they don't see him as really lovely. If you met a person who did what God did, that is, if you met a person who had a bunch of kids and he decided to kill more than half of them or torture and kill them because he could and be nice to another portion. And it wasn't good kids and bad kids we're talking about.

It's just, there's nothing, it's unconditional. He just decides he's going to favor some of his children and kill and torture the others. We'd call that a bad person.

In fact, we'd call him a sociopath probably. And yet to say that God is like that, we're saying, but God is a good person. But what he does is what only bad people would really do.

It's not really thinking of God realistically as a person. It's thinking, because I have this theological affirmation I make about him and these ones, I have to somehow make them work together in my concept of God. I've got a conceptual God.

But do I have a God who really resembles a person, a good person at all? Now they say, of course we do because the Bible says he's a good person. That's another theological concept they're affirming. We're talking about, what is it you really know personally about God? Do you know him as a person, as a loving person, as someone who's like Jesus or someone who's like Calvin? It's really, I've always wondered about this.

When Calvin is described how God is, do you really think of him as a real person? Can you imagine a real person acting that way and not being an evil person? How could anyone act that way and not be evil? God would call us evil if we did what Calvinism says he does. And yet we're supposed to imitate God. So our view of God has got to be tweaked, in my opinion, a negative way if we really embrace Calvinism completely.

And of course the other questions are, what about our view of people? I already dealt with Acts 10 and Cornelius because that's under question. Are we to think of all non-Christians as godless? Calvinists do. All non-Christians are haters of God.

But is that true? Are all non-Christians haters of God? Cornelius wasn't. The Bereans weren't. They were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians.

Lydia wasn't a Christian, but she was a worshiper of God. Where does this idea come from that all non-Christians are godless people? Well, it comes from, I think, a misreading of certain passages about total depravity. But if you believe those things, you can't help but see your unsaved neighbors through a certain lens.

These people are horribly corrupt people. They may look like they're good people, but it's a deception. They only look like they're nice.

They're really very evil haters of God. Why? Because my Calvinism tells me so. I have to believe that.

I can't think charitably of them. I can't take them at face value. I can't really believe that these people who are not yet regenerated could be actually decent folks.

Sure, they need Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus. There's nobody going to be saved without Jesus.

But some people who aren't saved yet aren't all that bad. Not as bad as Calvinism says. The Bible itself bears witness to that.

Remember, James White, Calvinist, said that God justly condemns rebel sinners who love their sin and who spit in his face on a daily basis. God is under no obligation to extend his grace to the rebel sinner. And every single person who enters into eternal punishment would, were they given the opportunity, freely choose to remain under punishment rather than bow the knee in loving adoration to a God they hate.

The idea that those who are punished are innocent victims or denied a chance is scandalously false. The thrice holy God is under no obligation to grant chances in the first place. Now, he's missing the whole point.

Remember, Calvinism emphasizes God's prerogatives. Christianity emphasizes God's character. He's saying, God doesn't have to give people chances.

How can you make him give chances to people? I'm not interested in making him do anything. He doesn't have to give chances. But if he's the kind of God the Bible says he is, I think he wants to give people chances.

The issue is not what are God's rights. Calvinists always want to stand up for God's rights. God doesn't do that.

God, Jesus, existed in the form of God and he gave up his rights. God is not jealous over his rights like Calvinists are. He emptied himself and took on the form of a servant.

That's not a God who's obsessed with his rights. That's a God who's obsessed with love. That's a God of a certain kind of character, trying to make himself known for his character, not insisting on his rights.

Now, God can insist on his rights and Calvinists are all about that. God's right to damn people. God's right to save who he wants to.

God's freedom. The potter's freedom. It's all about God's rights.

Well, great. I've got no problem with God's rights. The Bible affirms God has rights.

But the Bible does not affirm that God is all about defending his rights. He's all about laying down his rights, becoming a servant, dying, and saving people. It's his character, his love, that is emphasized in the gospel, not his prerogatives.

And I say that without in any way wishing to diminish his prerogatives. I'm just interested in knowing him as he's revealed himself and saying God is under no obligation to grant chances. True, but irrelevant.

The question is not, is he under obligation? The question is, has he done so anyway? Even though he's not under obligation, has he done that anyway? Has he given people chances? I think he has. I think the Bible says that. But notice how James White describes not the worst sinners, but all sinners.

Not the evil people, but all unregenerate people. They spit in his face on a daily basis. They're rebel sinners.

He says, every one of them would rather stay in hell if given the chance, than bow the knee to the God they hate. Every sinner, every non-Christian fits that description? Now, as a Christian raised in an evangelical home, in an evangelical church, there was a time when I could read that and say, boy, that nails it. That's partly because, A, I didn't know very many sinners, and therefore I was able to paint them in my mind whatever colors I thought the theological propositions required.

So, even though I didn't know very many sinners, I could assume these people are fomenting cauldrons of putridity, and wickedness, and hatred against God. Actually getting to know some unbelievers made that a little harder to accept, but as long as I believed the Bible taught it, I'd believe it. What I now think is, that's not what the Bible says It's about all people who aren't saved.

And I'm not under obligation to think that, but if I'm a Calvinist, I'm under obligation to, every non-Christian, I mean, that person, I have to suspect that any kindness they may be showing, they're hypocrites, they're pretending to be nice, they're not inside, they're really haters of God, they're spitting in his face, they'd rather go to hell than bow to God. I don't know that that's, I don't think we're entitled to say that, not on the basis of Scripture, and certainly not on the basis of experience either. It simply is a very uncharitable way to think of everybody who isn't saved.

And I don't think being uncharitable is a Christian virtue, but it is a necessity if you're a

Calvinist. So, I believe that Calvinism is, in fact, can have a bad impact on our view of people. It makes us less likely to see them as real human beings, and more just as evil monsters of iniquity.

And frankly, lots of people are monsters of iniquity. We know that. We hear the news.

We watch the news. There are monsters of iniquity out there, no question about it. Some of them even get saved in prison once they're caught.

Some of the worst monsters have shown that they're not beyond turning to God. And you know which ones I'm thinking of. Jeffrey Dahmer and such.

You hardly can find worse monsters of iniquity than that, and yet, even they, God loves and keeps reaching out to and saves, in some cases, before they die. Now, if that's true of them, then even if people are monsters of iniquity, we should think, you know, God still loves them. But are they all? Calvinism paints everyone with the same brush.

You're either a saint or you're a monster. That's not... The truth is more nuanced than that. There's more shades than that.

It's true that no one can be saved without Christ, but that doesn't mean that the people who have not yet been saved without Christ are as bad as they can be imagined to be. Some of them are not that bad. They're not good enough to be saved, but they are not as bad as Calvinism would make us view them.

And it would cause us to have a very uncharitable judgment that we make. Everything okay back there? Good, okay. Okay, real quickly, third thing.

How does this affect our assurance of salvation? We don't have to go into detail about this because I talked a great deal about it when we're talking about the perseverance. If you don't persevere, you're not elect. And therefore, you can't know if you're elect until you have persevered.

Clark Pinnock, in his book, *Grace Unlimited*, said, he's not a Calvinist, he said, It's not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish, Jesus said. On this promise hangs, we believe, the validity of the universal offer of the gospel and the possibility of Christian assurance. If we do not know that God loves all sinners, we do not know that he loves us.

And we do not know that he loves those to whom we take the gospel. Now, if perseverance is the ultimate proof of election, how can I know before I have persevered to my deathbed, whether I'm saved or not? It's interesting because this has been a very real struggle for Calvinists who have been thinkers and taking their theology to the logical conclusion. I mentioned that I have a friend who's a reformed pastor, one of the sweetest men I've known, and a very good friend of mine, and he's the only Calvinist I've

actually met who said he didn't know if he's elect or not.

He's a good Christian man, but he just knows, unless he perseveres to the end, he can't know if he's really saved. What a horrible thing, to be in the ministry as a Christian minister, loving God, seeking to serve God, but not knowing for sure if you're going to hell or not. And R.T. Kendall, who wrote a book on Calvin, he said, if the reprobate may believe that God is merciful toward them, and he's talking about people who think they're saved, but they're really not in Calvinism's view, how can we, the elect, be sure that our believing the same thing is any different from theirs? That is, if there are, in fact, people who fall away and prove they were reprobate in Calvin's system, yet they believe they were saved, if they are reprobate, but they can believe they're saved, how can we be sure that our believing we're saved is any different than their delusion? R.C. Sproul quoted in Philip Congdon's book, *Soteriological Implications of Five Points of Calvinism*, actually, it's not a book, it's an article, in the *Journal of Grace*.

He wrote, there are people in this world who are not saved, but are convinced that they are. Well, of course, I think everyone recognizes that, but to the Calvinists, that's a very important thing, because Sproul, I'm sure, is convinced that he is saved, but if there are people in this world who are convinced that they're saved, but they're not, how does he know he's not one of them? R.T. Kendall, again, in *Calvin and English Calvinism until 1649*, I think that is a book quoted in another magazine, *Bob Wilkin*, in *Grace Report* quotes this. Kendall says, nearly all of the Puritan divines, now, all the Puritans were Calvinists.

He said, nearly all the Puritan divines went through great doubt and despair on their deathbeds as they realized that their lives did not give perfect evidence that they were elect. Now, these are like leading pastors. The Puritans were usually pastors of congregations, strong Calvinists, good devotional writers.

Their writings were very edifying, but a great number of them, he said nearly all of them, on their deathbeds were still not sure if they were saved. Now, I would say most modern Calvinists go to their death quite sure they're saved, only because they're not thinking their theology through as clearly as the Puritan divines did. Puritan divines thought very carefully about things, very clearly, and were very Calvinistic, and they realized there's no grounds for knowing you're saved if you're a Calvinist.

And that's why these, some of the leading Calvinist preachers and writers in history, did not have assurance of their salvation. So, how could a Calvinist have it? Only by not thinking that clearly. Because the Calvinists I know who say they have assurance of salvation, they say, sure, there's people who think they're saved, but I'm not one of them.

Well, how do you know that? Well, just because I know I'm not. Well, didn't they know they're not, just as much as you know you're not? No, they're different than me. I'm me.

And others can be deceived about this, but I can't. There's a certain arrogance about it. It's funny because Calvinism says that Arminians are the arrogant ones, because Arminians think there's free will.

And they say, oh, they think man has the power to choose. Isn't that man-exalting? Isn't that arrogant? And it's very common for Calvinists to accuse anything other than Calvinists as being arrogant. But actually, any Calvinist who's convinced that he really is saved before he's persevered to the end is the arrogant one.

He will admit that many people have thought they were saved as much as he thinks he is. But we're not. But not him.

Why? Because he's him and they were them. That's why. It's really what it boils down to.

They're assuming that I'm not capable of being deceived like other men. That's not a humble attitude. And I mentioned our view of biblical hermeneutics.

Jerry Walls just made this interesting comment in his book, *Why I'm Not a Calvinist*. He said, somewhere along the way, the burden of reading myriad passages throughout the Bible in such a counterintuitive fashion should anxiously bring us to this sort of question. Since the Calvinist view of divine sovereignty routinely requires such an awkward decoding of biblical texts, should not we reexamine the Calvinist view of divine sovereignty itself? Now the awkward re... What do you call it? The awkward decoding of biblical texts and the myriad passages throughout the Bible in such a counterintuitive fashion.

What's he referring to? Well, we brought those things up. All the things they call mysteries. Which is just about everything.

Everything turns out to be a mystery because everything is in fact contradictory. And you can't have contradictions in a true system, but you can have mysteries. So the contradictions are transformed into mysteries.

Those mysteries involve counterintuitive readings of the Bible. And decoding. You have to read the word, the elect, into this verse.

And these other scores of verses. Because otherwise you won't understand that this is only about the elect. Well, doesn't this raise questions as to whether we can understand the Bible at all? If we can counterintuitively understand so many things that seem to say one thing, say, oh no, if you know the facts, it says something else than that.

Myriad verses like that. How do you have any confidence that anything you're reading in the Bible is correct? Maybe it's all mysterious. Maybe everything's not what it seems to be.

If you've got scores of passages that are not what they seem to be, maybe the rest of the passages aren't what they seem to be. Who can say? It causes you to realistically lose confidence that you have any ability to understand the Scriptures at all. Go back to having a pope to interpret it for you, because you have no ability to understand it.

Because it doesn't look like it's saying what the Calvinists are saying. But it is, according to them. So what else is there that doesn't seem like the Bible says that it really is saying? This is the problem.

Calvinism makes us, in some respects, I think, compromise our view of God. Compromise our view of our fellow man. Compromise our assurance of salvation.

And compromise our understanding of the Bible and our way of interpreting it. Now, I don't think Calvinists will agree to most of that that I've just said. That's why I've tried to illustrate what I mean by it.

I think the only way to be a Calvinist and not to impact these areas negatively is to be an inconsistent Calvinist. Because Calvinists who are consistent often recognize some of these things and live it out. Calvin is a great example of a consistent Calvinist.

The way he lived was not desirable. His view of God led him to want to kill heretics. His view of people, likewise.

If they weren't Christians, arrest them, burn them. His interpretation of Scripture, well, how does this make sense? It's a mystery. I don't know if Calvin died doubting his salvation or not.

I don't know enough about him. But many of the people who bought seriously his doctrines realized that this placed their own assurance of salvation at risk. I close with this poem.

John Greenleaf Whittier. It's an interesting poem. It's about a little girl and her father.

Her father is a preacher, a Calvinist preacher. They've left the church and they're walking out through the garden. They're discussing the sermon that he's preached about the sovereignty of God.

Picking it up, at this point, it says, Then up spoke the little maiden, treading on snow and pink. O father, these pretty blossoms are very wicked, I think. Had there been no Garden of Eden, there never had been a fall.

And if never a tree had blossomed, God would have loved us all. Hush, child, the father answered. By his decree, man fell.

His ways are in clouds and darkness, but he doeth all things well. And whether by his ordaining to us cometh good or ill, joy or pain, or light or sorrow, we must fear and love

him still. Oh, I fear him, said the daughter, and I try to love him too.

But I wish he was as good and gentle, kind and loving as you. And that really says it all. If God is the God of Calvary, he's not as good and loving as even good Christians are.

Or most fathers are. He's less loving than a father. And yet Jesus said, if earthly fathers are imperfect and do good things, how much more does your heavenly father? Your father is more loving than an earthly father.

But Calvinism denies this. It doesn't deny it by stating that in that proposition, God is less loving than man. They would probably argue the opposite.

And yet the God they describe behaves in a way that no man doing the same would be considered loving at all. Or even anything less than a monster. And so, maybe those are harsh words.

And actually, when I talk about theologies I disagree with, I try to avoid being overly harsh. But sometimes, you've got to say things plainly. This is the implications of the system.

Whether Calvinists want to say they are or not, just will depend on how much they're committed to being logical. How much they're committed to taking their own beliefs to their logical and unavoidable conclusions. Many Calvinists can't live with those conclusions, but they want to be Calvinists, so they will not agree to those conclusions.

They'll just not take their theology that far. I know this from my dealings with them, my debates with them, my reading them. There's some who just will, you know, they can't deny that these are logical.

Well, they can deny it, but they can't demonstrate it. They'll say, no, that's not the logical outreach. Well, show me that it isn't.

No, it's a mystery. You're just not understanding it. Well, I think I am.

And I think some Calvinists do too. And they end up being very disturbed by it as well. Some of them even leave the faith, the Calvinist faith, and become something else.

Sometimes what they become is a more biblical Christian. That's what we want to be as much as possible, is biblical Christians. It's not our goal to be non-Calvinist.

If Calvinism is biblical, then we want to be Calvinists. If it's not, we don't want to be. We just want to be biblical Christians, and we shouldn't have any emotional attachment to something that is not biblical.

But thankfully, the objectionable aspects of Calvinism, fortunately, are not biblical. And that's what we've labored to try to demonstrate. Not just to denounce, but to

demonstrate.

Because that's the only responsible way to reject any system. And I do reject Calvinism.
All five points.