

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST: WHOSE VERSION?

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S



OR

JOHN CALVIN'S



A Biblical Critique
Researched and Compiled
by
Ron Myers

The Gospel of Jesus Christ:
Whose Version; The Apostle Paul's or John Calvin's?
A Biblical Critique

Ron Myers

RS-501 Graduate Research and Writing

In Partial Fulfillment for a
Master's Degree in Biblical Studies

October 21, 2020

Southern California Seminary

2075 E. Madison Ave.

El Cajon, CA 92019

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by

Ron Myers

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my professor, Dr. John Yeo,
who provided both inspiration and encouragement, and to
all those who might have been confused or misled
by the belief system known as Calvinism.

*“The Gospel means Good News, and if you don’t have good
news for all, then you don’t have good news at all”*

*“The whosoever will receive Christ are the vessels of God’s mercy,
while the whosoever won’t, are the vessels of His wrath.”*

*“Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God
through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

*“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe
that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*

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Introduction

It's been said that if you're not certain what you believe, you'll likely fall for whatever comes along.¹ Half a millennia ago, a French theologian by the name of John Calvin (1509–1566)² proposed a theory in his thesis, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).³ In it, Calvin laid out how he perceived God's plan of Salvation, suggesting that God foreordained a preselect few to be saved (the *elect*) and the rest He foreordained to perish. Since then, there has been an incalculable amount of confusion in the Christian community. It has also engendered an ongoing polarizing dichotomy about who is qualified to receive God's gift of salvation and who isn't. That is, who can be an eternally secure, born-again child of God and who can't. This writer maintains Calvin's theory is dubious at best and indefensible at worst when matched against Scripture and Gospel of Grace that Paul preached.

Four fundamental questions arise from this watershed issue. (1) Is salvation truly the gift of God, given graciously to *whomsoever will* repent and receive Christ by Grace through Faith, without works, according to Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8–9, and Titus 3:5?⁴ Or (2), does God show partiality, giving salvation to only a few, as Calvin so boldly asserted?⁵ (3) Is Calvin's theory compatible with the Gospel Paul preached, given directly from Jesus Christ? Or (4), is it *another gospel* altogether, contrived by men (1 Corinthians 15:1–4; Galatians 1:6–12)?⁶ God's Word gives a stern warning about altering the scriptures, namely concerning the Gospel message and requirements for salvation, stating that "Every word of God is pure; do not add to His Words lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

¹ This follows the popular saying: "*If You Don't Stand for Something, You'll Fall for Anything*"

² Gene Taylor, "Calvinism Analyzed and Answered," Church of Christ in Zion, IL, March 2005, <https://www.padfield.com/acrobat/taylor/calvinism.pdf>, 4.

³ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006).

⁴ This writer uses all Scripture quotes, taken from the Authorized King James Version (KJV) Public Domain, as well as the New King James Version (NKJV) online in version, Copyright 2002. The *New King James Version* was commissioned in 1975 by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN.

⁵ Roy B. Zuck, "Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002), 483–84.

⁶ For another Gospel see Paul's Epistle to the Galatians 1:6–12.

This writer believes Calvinism (also known as Reformed,⁷ Covenant, or Sovereign Grace theology)⁸ is contradictory to the authentic Gospel of Grace that Paul preached, which was made known to him by Jesus Christ in a vision (not by man's assumptions), according the Galatians 1:11–12. According to John Calvin, God determined before creation that only certain preselected individuals, the *elect*, could (and would) be saved.⁹ It also asserts that Christ's atoning blood was shed *only* for the *prechosen elect*. Furthermore, those not elect are born without hope by God's predetermined design; because He created them specifically to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire, for His sovereign glory—their sin not being covered by Christ's atonement. Even if they repent and believe the Gospel, they can *never* be saved since they were not included in the body of God's *elect*!

This paper will to show how Calvinism's *doctrines of Grace* are *not* grounded in Scripture, but are of human philosophical origin—*contrary* to the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached by Paul. They contradict the rightly divided word of truth, plainly understood according to a literal, contextual, and grammatically correct rendering, i.e., exegesis; to draw out the author's intended meaning contained within the text (2 Timothy 2:15). Not allegorize or alter the text to align with a preferred dogma, i.e., eisegesis—meaning to insert a different meaning into the text that it does not actually say or imply (2 Peter 1:20–21).¹⁰

Dr. Lance B. Latham (AKA “Doc Latham”), founding pastor of the North Side Gospel Center in Chicago, founding director of the AWANA youth program; and charter Executive Committee Member of The New Tribes Mission (circa 1942), stated in his treatise, *Discovering the Gospel*;

The Gospel is the Good News. It is not a new set of religious obligations or duties to be performed—new strivings or more agonizings—but rather an announcement of what has been freely and graciously done for us. Therefore, we do not merely declare the ‘claims’ of the Gospel. We declare a wonderful free offer by God Himself to the lost sinner who believes.¹¹

⁷ The *Reformed* doctrine of Calvinism (1519) is not to be confused with Martin Luther's *Protestant Reformation* (1517).

⁸ Although this writer uses the term “Calvinism” throughout this paper, his inference includes the whole genre of TULIP-related limited atonement theology despite whatever title it is given by different individuals or groups.

⁹ Dave Hunt, *In Defense of the Faith: Biblical Answers to Challenging Questions* (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2009), Kindle ed.: chap. 9, loc. 3712-5445.

¹⁰ *Exegesis* means to “extract” or draw the literally-intended original meaning out of a passage, according to its context (which both God and the original human author intended). This is accomplished by employing exegetical and hermeneutical principles of interpretation. Whereas, *eisegesis* entails “inserting” an extraneous sense of meaning into the text, regardless of what its literal reading implies, forcing the Scripture to convey something it does not say.

¹¹ Lance B. (Doc) Latham, “A Voice from the Past: DISCOVERING THE GOSPEL,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 1999, pp. 67-72.

Most Calvinists are godly men like John MacArthur (Master's), John Piper (Desiring God) and R.C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries).¹² Others, like D. Scheiderer, are very pedantic, writing reams of materials dogmatically splitting hairs over minor distinctions between factions.¹³ Unfortunately, some hyper five-pointers are argumentative bullies and narcissistic zealots who prefer church history, Reformed creeds, and favored beliefs over Scripture. Many of these types harbor sanctimonious attitudes while exhibiting an unchristlike demeanor in their quest to force their convoluted theology onto others (Ephesians 5:9; Titus 1:13–14, Jude 1:3–4). Yet despite differences in personalities and degrees of zeal, Calvinist doctrines all coincide, by and large.

Many of these types—having bought into the Calvinist philosophical system—proudly assume they possess a greater intelligence and superior understanding of the Scriptures over non-Calvinists. As such, they are convinced they alone have the *real* Gospel, and that non-Calvinists don't. Pastors that harbor this mindset often refuse to have members, or support missionaries, that do not share their extremist views—claiming that others teach a false Gospel.¹⁴ Yet, this paper is not about appraising people or critiquing personalities. Rather it's about evaluating the teachings and philosophies of Calvinism and its out-workings from a Biblical perspective. It will also cover Armenian and Biblicist teachings and philosophies for comparative analysis purposes.

The Gospel message of salvation from sin and death is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, who said *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me"* (John 14:6). Peter adds, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). God's Word speaks of Christians being overcomers. How does one become an overcomer? *"For whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"* (1 John 5:4–5). This is something we dare not get wrong to our eternal peril. Note carefully. We are victorious overcomers, *not* by being one of the prechosen *elect*, but by exercising our personal *faith*; wholly *trusting* in the one who saves by Grace, through faith alone, apart from works—The Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; Romans 8:37).

¹² Nathan W. Bingham, "Dr. R.C. Sproul," Ligonier Ministries: The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul, n.d., <https://www.ligonier.org/about/rc-sproul/>.

¹³ Daniel Scheiderer, "Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 82, no. 1 (Spring, 2020), 137–52, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sdcc.edu: 2443/>.

¹⁴ This scenario describes the experience of the writer as he witnessed a hardline Calvinist zealot take over and demolish his loved home sending church, Venice Baptist, Venice Center, NY. The man even cut off the support of worthy missionaries not holding the Calvinist position, claiming they weren't preaching the true Gospel, i.e., Calvinism.

The Gospel Theme: Whosoever Will, May Come

The term Gospel (*evangelion*) means “glad tidings,” as seen in Luke 2:10: “glad tidings of great joy for *all* people.”¹⁵ It has been said that “*The Gospel is Good News, and if you don’t have good news for all, then you don’t have good news at all*” (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Peter 3:9).¹⁶ Conversely, Calvinism is indisputably *another* gospel only for the *few* (cf. John 12:32; Galatians 1:7). This writer will attempt to show the implications between Paul’s and Calvin’s opposing positions as he understands them and as defined in his reference material. He will clarify his own beliefs as a *Biblicist* as well as contrast these two opposing views, also separating *Calvinist* and *Arminian* beliefs from the authentic Gospel that the Apostle Paul preached, having received it directly from the risen Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3–8; Galatians 1:11).

If the rebuttal of Calvinism was reduced to one sentence, it would be: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for whosoever will!”¹⁷ The all-encompassing theme of John’s Gospel is a *whosoever will* message of Grace and truth (John 1:14). In John 3:14–16, Christ explains the Gospel to Nicodemus. He recounts how Moses raised a bronze serpent over the Israelites dying from poisonous snake bite, explaining that whoever gazed at that bronze effigy would be healed. He related that to “*Whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Bottom line? Salvation is given freely by God to *all* who come to Him humbly in repentant Faith (Acts 20:21), not just a select few. “For there is no partiality with God” (Psalms 51:17; Romans 2:11). Also, concerning repentance; biblically speaking, repentance means a change thought or mindset, not a change of direction. The change of one’s direction sequentially follows a change of mind, not vice-versa, empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:21; Romans 5:5)

A wise elderly pastor once explained quite concisely that “*Whosoever will* receive Christ are the vessels of God’s mercy, while the *whosoever won’t* are the vessels of His wrath.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Biblestudytools.com, “*Eklelogmai* Meaning in New Testament Greek Lexicon,” Accessed October 5, 2020, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/eklegomai.html>.

¹⁶ From a message by Pastor Richard Sanford, speaker at large for New Tribes Mission, Sanford, FL. Spoken at New Tribes Mission Primary Training Center, Durham, Ontario, Canada, 1970.

¹⁷ Grant Ralston and Edward Ralston, *Tackling Tulip: Exposing the Biblical, Theological, and Practical Errors of Calvinism* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2019), Kindle ed.: fwd., loc. 54–3648.

¹⁸ Said by retired pastor Rev. Albert Garcia (Venice Baptist Ch.) to this writer at his home in Kissimmee, Florida, 1979.

The Fountain of Life (Psalm 36:9)

The Gospel message can also be seen in Christ's dialogue with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well (John 4:5–15). While coming to get water at Jacob's well, she noticed Jesus resting near the well, wearied after a long day's journey. After asking for a drink, He explained that natural water could only quench her thirst temporarily, but that He had water that could quench her thirst forever with in a fountain of eternal life flowing out from her being. Upon hearing Jesus' presentation, she believed and asked Him for a drink of that *living* water (John 4:15).¹⁹

Dr. J.B. Hixson of *Not by Works Ministries*, during his message *What the Gospel is Not (Part 4)*, stated that “context determines meaning.” Dixson also stated that eternal life, being contingent upon one's faith, is mentioned 160 times in God's Word.²⁰ Consequently, this writer believes the Calvinist argument is not against non-Calvinists, *per se*, but unwittingly against God Himself and His inspired written Word.

Furthermore, the Gospel message is a promise from God to save to the uttermost all who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:14–16, 36; Romans 4:2–3; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 7:25). It's *not* about personal piety, commitment, persevering, praying, striving, forsaking bad habits, seeking, or surrendering. Dr. Lance B. Latham says in his article “Discovering the Gospel” all these can be subtle forms of works, which cannot save.²¹ However, the *one* act that will save is a humble, heartfelt repentant plea for mercy as the corrupt tax collector did. That, as opposed to the self-righteous Pharisee's braggadocios claims in the account Jesus gave, noting which of the two men came away from the temple justified in God's sight (Luke 18:9–14).

What's the right response to the Gospel? Place one's trust fully in Christ alone and what He did—gave His lifeblood as full payment for the penalty incurred for one's sin (death). ... resting in that fact alone, apart from works or strivings. Rejection means eternal separation from God and all that is good in the *Lake of Unquenchable Fire*. Consider the analogy Jesus gave of Moses holding up the bronze effigy of a serpent (John 3:14–17). All who simply gazed on it were delivered from death, *not* just a select few (v. 14). That act signified Jesus being raised up on the Cross, that *Whosoever believed on Him* would be saved from condemnation (vv. 15–17).

¹⁹ Robert N. Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: chap. 1, loc. 219–2357.

²⁰ J.B. Hixson, April 7, 2021, accessed March 14, 2021, <https://notbyworks.podbean.com/e/what-the-gospel-is-not-part-4/>.

²¹ Lance B. (Doc) Latham, “A Voice from the Past: DISCOVERING THE GOSPEL,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 1999, pp. 67–72.

A Comparison of Beliefs

The Calvinist View: Salvation by Preordained Election

The term Sovereign Grace is linked to Calvin's teachings; defined in the TULIP acronym. Also called *Reformed* or *Covenant* theology, the emphasis is on divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility (mankind's free will), with which God created them. Each of the five letters represents a point of Calvin's doctrinal position:²² According to Calvin, God's sovereignty (supreme authority), and His Grace (divine favor), define God's plan of Salvation—*exercising faith* is wrongly seen as works. However, Grace is not a power God exerts, but an attribute of His loving character, described as God giving us something we don't deserve. Limited atonement means Christ died only for the *elect*; whom God chose before He founded the world. As for the non-elect, God created them for destruction. Oddly, Calvinism also teaches that infant or paedobaptism (christening) ensures a child's election.²³ This Catholic sacrament is still practiced by Calvinists today.

1. **Total Inability**—versus: Total depravity: Nothing good dwells in man to gain or deserve salvation (Rom 7:18).²⁴
2. **Unconditional Election**—versus: "Whoever desires let him come take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).
3. **Limited atonement**—versus: "God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:3–5).
4. **Irresistible Grace**—versus: "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40).
5. **Perseverance of the Saints**—versus: "Kept by the power of God through faith for Salvation" (1 Peter 1:5).

According to Shawn Lazar, author of *Why Biblical Election Is to Service and Not to Eternal life*, "There isn't a single verse in the Bible that says God elects individuals for eternal life or for eternal death."²⁵ Furthermore, J.B. Hixson, in *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, points out over a dozen Scripture passages where "whosoever" will exercise faith is a fact.²⁶ Combined with passages about justification by faith, there are over fifty passages that speak of exercising one's faith, from Genesis 15:6 to Revelation 22:17.²⁷ Yet those who hold to a Reformed view claim (wrongfully) that personal faith is a form of works. Not so, according to Ephesians 2:8–9, which separates them as opposites—exercising *faith* being necessary for salvation while depending on *Works* nullifies it.

²² Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy: Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin*, 2nd ed., (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 3, loc. 388–1755.

²³ Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?* (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2006), Kindle ed.: chap. 26, loc. 11018–14255.

²⁴ Curtis Hutson, *Why I Disagree with All Five Points of Calvinism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1980), loc. 1.

²⁵ Shawn Lazar, "Why Biblical election is to service and privilege, not to eternal life," *Grace in Focus*, 2014, pp. 4–8, https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/GIF-September-October-2014_web.pdf.

²⁶ J. B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong: The Evangelical Crisis No One Is Talking About*, Kindle (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2013).

²⁷ The writer verified the count using *BibleGateway.com* online Bible software of which he is a registered member.

Concerning *Perseverance*, Calvinists believe none can be sure of their election if they don't persevere.²⁸ This reflects both Arminian and Lordship theology—gaining salvation by observing certain dos and don'ts.²⁹ This means trusting in ones' own works *instead* of Christ (Romans 5:1; 1 John 5:13). Scripture is very clear; no one can be saved by Grace plus works, making Calvinism altogether *another* gospel (Galatians 1:9).³⁰

Perseverance of the Saints (works) is opposite in meaning from the *security of the believer*. Yet some non-Calvinists feel comfortable calling themselves one-point Calvinists, based on that false premise. Security of the believer means just what it implies; *saved forever* and kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). Our sin debt was canceled, having been paid in full in our stead by Christ at the Cross (Colossians 2:14), who rose again by the Spirit; an indication that His propitiatory sacrifice for us was accepted by the Father (Romans 5:1, 8:11).

Calvinists, in believing they must persevere to maintain their *elect* status, are seeking to gain salvation by works. What does *persevere* mean if it isn't a synonym for works? This is opposite from God's *preservation* of His redeemed ones (the security of the believer) by His Grace and power to save and keep to the uttermost and present us faultless before the throne (John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 7:25; Jude 1:24). Despite their claims of being *elect*, Calvinists are no different than Armenians, both of whom believe they can lose their salvation status if they don't *persevere*. Therefore, these two opposing views are the same in practice, striving to maintain salvation by works through which no one can ever be saved since works cancels out Grace.

Concerning *Total Depravity*, it describes being in a fallen state of sin without anything inherently good to earn or deserve salvation (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:14–31). Yet God, by His undeserved favor (Grace), has made alive those *in Christ* who were once dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13). Calvinist's distort total depravity by saying it means total inability to exercise trust in Christ—a Biblical command (Acts 16:31). They offer the analogy of a lifeless corpse, unable to do anything but lay there motionless—including unable to believe. However, depravity refers to being *spiritually* dead, whereas inability describes being dead *physically*. The correct view on depravity is that man is alive physically, but dead spiritually—separated from God due to trespasses and sins with nothing inherently good to earn or deserve salvation, or a right his lost condition. He needs to be quickened by the Holy Spirit, who indwells and gives eternal life upon trusting Christ (Ephesians 1:13–14).

²⁸ Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 126–2357.

²⁹ Michael Halsey, editor, *Freely by His Grace* (McDonough, GA, Grace Gospel Press, 2012), Kindle ed.: chap. 1, loc. 133–12139.

³⁰ C. Gordon Colson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Cedar Knolls, NJ, Global Gospel Pub., 2002), 268.

Being *physically dead* (a corpse) versus *spiritually dead* (unable to redeem oneself), are opposites. Yet Calvinists use the *physically dead* analogy to support their “total inability” doctrine—an unworkable and misleading analogy. Calvinist’s TULIP is entirely opposite from Biblicist views. For one, “*Perseverance of the saints*” is tantamount to a works gospel. Whereas, the Biblicist view of “*Saved by grace, through faith*” and “*Kept by the power of God*” is 100% grace—saved and kept by Grace alone apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:5).

The difference between these two views (Calvinism versus Biblicism) should be evident to Christians with an amount of discernment. Yet according to NY Times journalist Mark Oppenheimer—in an interview with Reformed Pastor Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church—concluded that Calvinism is rising in popularity.³¹ Why is this trend occurring? In his thesis “The Gospel Under Siege,” Zane Hodges offers an explanation:

The message of life which Jesus and His apostles preached is under attack by theologians today. No longer is justification by faith alone. . . . Theologians go to great lengths to define faith in such a way as to introduce commitment, obedience, and perseverance as conditions for everlasting life.³²

These trends are puzzling for conservative non-Calvinist Christians. Ironically, though, not fully understanding the doctrinal errors implied in the TULIP acronym—yet not wanting to be labeled as Arminian—many mistakenly call themselves one-, two-, or three-pointers.³³ Excuse me for repeating myself, but this writer believes the Calvinist dispute is not against non-Calvinists, but against God’s Word itself, which contradicts each of Calvinism’s five-point worldview; the TULIP doctrine.³⁴ Any astute Biblicist understands the implications involved and shuns both Calvinist and Arminian theologies.³⁵

Like other *extra-Biblical* belief systems, Calvinists hold to a theological theory that blindly disregards Scripture, placing their TULIP doctrine above God’s Word.³⁶ They are a modern counterpart of the Pharisees of Christ’s day. He chastens them as *setting aside scripture and teaching for doctrine the commandments and traditions of men* (cf. Mark 7:6–9). Calvinists gravitate towards Reformed authors and *Creeds* or *Articles of Faith* to bolster their beliefs, like the London Baptist Confession (1689). In doing so, they distort and dilute Scripture with their unscriptural theories. However, Biblicists rely exclusively on the unaltered text of the written Word of God, believing and defending the truth contained therein (cf. Proverbs 30:5–6).

³¹ Mark Oppenheimer, “Evangelicals Find Themselves in the Midst of a Calvinist Revival,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/04/us/a-calvinist-revival-for-evangelicals.html>.

³² Zane Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2011), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 107–8190.

³³ Curtis Hutson, *Why I Disagree with All Five Points of Calvinism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1980), loc. 8.

³⁴ *ibid*, *Why I Disagree with All Five Points of Calvinism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1980), loc. 20.

³⁵ Belief in the historical, grammatical, contextual, exegetically accurate literal interpretation of Scripture as originally intended.

³⁶ Tom Tomasella, By, and -, “Calvinism Refuted with One Bible Verse [Podcast] - Todd Tomasella,” Safe Guard Your Soul, March 17, 2021, <https://safeguardyoursoul.com/calvinism-refuted-with-one-bible-verse/>.

The Arminian View: Salvation by Personal Maintenance

After John Calvin published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, later known as Calvinism, Jacobus Arminius presented his own views on salvation. Opposing the absolute sovereign predestination theory of John Calvin, Arminius held that free will is compatible with God's sovereignty. Calvin believed in *Individual Election*, whereas Jacobus Arminius believed in *Corporate Election*. One Arminian view is that God *looked ahead* to see whom He wanted to choose based on their foreseen faith.³⁷ Arminius also held that salvation is not secure or irrefutable. Vinson writes that according to Arminian tradition, one may walk away from salvation or lose it by falling into sin and backsliding.³⁸ Colson adds that if their faith cools off, they fear their salvation is in jeopardy.³⁹ However, Paul states: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

John Calvin's theories became known as Calvinism at the Synod of Dort (1618–19), sixty years after his death (1566).⁴⁰ According to Nodal Milieus, perhaps no other issue in theology engenders so much controversy as the Calvinism versus Arminianism debate.⁴¹ These two opposing views both thrive today. Arminianism is held by those who do not believe in the eternal security of the Christian (cf. John 6:47), believing instead that salvation must be *maintained* by following a vague man-made list of dos and don'ts. The following is a truncated comparison of Arminianism versus Calvinism, which arose from the controversy at the *Synod of Dort*—taken from an outline by Steele and Thomas.⁴²

³⁷ Kevin Jackson, "An Explanation of Simple Foreknowledge," Society of Evangelical Arminians, April 16, 2012, <http://evangelicalarminians.org/an-explanation-of-simple-foreknowledge/>.

³⁸ Vinson Synan, "Theological Boundaries: The Arminian Tradition," *Pneuma* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1981): 38–53, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sdcc.edu: 2443/>.

³⁹ C. Gordon Colson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Cedar Knolls, NJ, Global Gospel Pub., 2002) 315.

⁴⁰ Modern History Sourcebook, "The Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619," Fordham University, accessed October 27, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1619dordt.asp>.

⁴¹ Milieus, *Calvinism Refuted* (Seattle: Amazon, 2019), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 161–2357.

⁴² David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans, an Interpretive Outline* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1963) 147–148.

The “Five Points” of Arminianism

1. *Free Will or Human Ability to Believe and Be Saved.*
2. *Conditional Election, by Grace through Faith.*
3. *Universal Redemption or General Atonement.*
4. *The Holy Spirit’s Wooing Can be Resisted.*
5. *Can Fall from Grace by Unbelief or Misbehavior.*

The “Five Points” of Calvinism

1. *Total Inability to Believe and Be Saved.*
2. *Unconditional Election; by God’s Sovereign Choice.*
3. *Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption.*
4. *Irresistible Grace or Effectual Call Cannot be Resisted.*
5. *Perseverance of the Saints.* (Also works-based.⁴³)

This writer fails to see any basis for the Armenian rejection of Biblical truth, which clearly states that every born-again believer is *forever secure in Christ* (John 10:28). Especially with the many promises in God’s Word contrary to their claims (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Hebrews 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5). Notwithstanding, they would rather accept the fallacious belief that their salvation and standing *in Christ* is *insecure*—dependent upon their assistance by good works. It is incomprehensible since they’re actually secure. This writer is familiar with their blasphemous claims that “*The doctrine of eternal security is straight from the pits of Hell.*”⁴⁴

Saying that eternal security is “*straight from the pits of Hell*” is an affront to God and His Word. Multiple Scripture passages speak to eternal security: “Abraham believed God and his faith was counted as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6); “Gods mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136:1–3); “Shall never perish, but live forever” (John 3:15–16, 6:51 & 58, 10:28–29); Not by works, but by his mercy” (Titus 3:5); “I will never forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5); “Born again forever” (1 Peter 1:23); “Abides forever” (1 John 2:17, 2 John 1:2); “Reign forever” (Revelation 22:5), to name 18 of them. Yet no passages support the idea that our salvation and standing *in Christ* is insecure and needing works. This writer has spoken with those who once believed in “insecurity.” They admitted to a constant uneasiness, wondering if they had done enough good works to stay saved. Whose list of works should one go by? God has only one requirement, found in John’s Gospel. Jesus said, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*” (John 6:29).

The simple yet profound truth is that, whosoever embraces God’s gift of salvation, offered freely by Grace, through faith, has passed from spiritual death to eternal life—paid in full by the atoning work of Jesus Christ on his or her behalf. And, is therefore saved and forgiven forever of all sin: past, present, and future—as well as all delivered from all judgement, reserved for the unrepentant sinner (Romans 8:1).

⁴³ Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 126–2357.

⁴⁴ Tom Tomasella, By, and -, “Calvinism Refuted with One Bible Verse [Podcast] - Todd Tomasella,” Safe Guard Your Soul, March 17, 2021, <https://safeguardyoursoul.com/calvinism-refuted-with-one-bible-verse/>.

Findings and Determinations

How do these two contrasting theological views play out? Arminians *weaken* the power of the Gospel by denying the eternal security of the believer. They emphasize man's freewill and believe they need to rely on personal good works to keep their salvation—or get saved again if they don't. Conversely, Calvinists stress God's sovereignty by discounting human responsibility altogether. However, they too believe they must rely on personal good works—which they call *perseverance*—to maintain their *elect* status.⁴⁵ If they don't maintain, they believe they are left without hope due to their TULIP belief in *Limited Atonement*. Ironically, those in either group (if truly born-again) are saved by Grace through Faith and are eternal secure in Christ whether they realize it or not.

As for Calvinists, they usurp Scriptural authority by *inserting* their favorite beliefs, redefining God's Word to conform to their liking (eisegesis). As such, they not only create *another gospel of works*, limiting the *whosoever will* Gospel of Grace, but risk God's judgement in doing so (Galatians 1:9; Revelation 22:18–19). Yet the Scriptures are clear concerning works: “*Not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

How do Calvinists explain away these verses? “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost, those who come to God through Him [in faith], since He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25, 11:6). These negate Calvinism's TULIP beliefs.

Of these two opposing departures from the true Gospel that Paul preached—Calvinists limiting Grace and Arminians weakening it—both share a faulty belief. They both believe it necessary to maintain their salvation. Calvinists persevere by works to guard their *elect* status while Arminians rely on works to stay saved. These notions turn the true Gospel into *another gospel*—a gospel of dead works that *does not* promise salvation but judgment (Galatians 1:6–9).⁴⁶ Consequently, neither position can enjoy the faith-rest life or the promised security of the believer—always wondering if they have done enough to show elect status, or to maintain salvation.

Scripture has dire warnings concerning those who hold these beliefs. They risk God's judgement by adding man-made requirements to salvation (Revelation 22:18–19), which is by Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). Like the Judiazers of Paul's day, Calvinists limit the power of the Gospel by rejecting its all-encompassing scope of Christ's atoning work for *whosoever* comes in faith believing. Armenians disbelieve God's power to keep them to the uttermost, so rely on works (Isaiah 53:6, 55:1; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:4-5; 1 John 2:2; Jude 1:24; Revelation 22:17).

⁴⁵ From a conversation with Mr. Manley Johnson, Venice Baptist Church, Venice Center, NY, 1978.

⁴⁶ Robert N. Wilkin, “Works Salvation Does Not Work,” *Grace in Focus*, 2021, pp. 4-7, https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GIF-March-April-2021_web.pdf.

Ironically, with all doctrinal jockeying set aside, both Calvinists and Arminians—although holding opposing views—conjoin in the final analysis in that they both rely on *good works*. Neither are resting in the finished work of Christ on their behalf since ultimately, both feel the need to persevere through doing good works to maintain salvation according to their diametrically opposed schools of thought. That is the crux of the whole matter. Is Salvation attained ^(a)by *Grace* alone through *faith* alone, or ^(b)with the assistance of *good works*. Only one of these can make a person righteous in God’s sight and it is *never* through good works.

Scriptures declare in 1 John 4:8, and 4:16, that “God is Love” (*agape*). All three forms of Love in Greek (*agapaō*, *agape*, and *agapētos*) occur a total of 320 times in Scripture. Whereas, Calvinist’s favorite buzzword “Sovereign” is found *nowhere* in scripture, except for one instance in the New King James version, referring to Saul establishing his *sovereignty* (or rule) over Israel (1 Samuel 14:47).

Unlike Calvinists (or even Armenians) Biblicists believe scripture teaches that God *sovereignly* chose *whom* He would save, *how* He would save them, and by what *means* He would keep them from falling. That is, God promised unconditionally to save whomsoever will (all) that come to Him in Faith believing (Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28; Romans 9:14–15; Revelation 22:17). He chose to save them by *Grace* alone, through *faith* alone, *apart from works* (Titus 3:4–5). He also promised unconditionally to *keep* them eternally secure by *His mighty power* (John 10:28–30; 1 Peter 1:3–5; Jude 1:24), apart from striving or persevering.

Salvation is God’s *gift* (Romans 6:23), given freely by Grace through Faith: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Works being contrary to saving faith, for what purpose are they? ...to help one persevere? ...to maintain salvation? No. Verse ten emphatically states that good works are sovereignly ordained by God for the purpose of glorifying and magnifying Him through one’s life, lived out according to His purpose: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Every Bible-believing Christian needs to understand that salvation and eternal life is given fully and freely by Grace, through faith, upon repentance (a change of mind), and faith in Christ’s atoning work on their behalf (Acts 20:21). It is given by God as an *unconditional* gift to all who believe, according to the promises in His Word (John 3:14–16, 3:36, 5:24; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 5:12).⁴⁷ Every believer is also *kept* by the power of God and can never be lost. Again, this is according to the promise in God’s Word; even if the believer might grow faint of heart at times, their salvation is secure (John 10:27–29; 2 Timothy 2:12–14; Hebrews 13:5). If works were required, salvation would be based on certain conditions; not by Grace alone through faith.

⁴⁷ Robert N. Wilkin, “Works Salvation Does Not Work,” *Grace in Focus*, 2021, pp. 4-7, https://faithalone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GIF-March-April-2021_web.pdf.

The Biblicist View: Saved by Grace through Faith

A Biblicist is a knowledgeable Bible-believing Christian who holds to a literal, grammatical, historical method of Scripture interpretation to determine the author's intent—according to a traditional, contextual hermeneutic or methodological and normal dispensational analysis. A Biblicist also believes that the Scriptures, interpreted in their natural, literal sense, reveal divinely determined dispensations or eschatology periods.⁴⁸ Furthermore, a Biblicist practices Biblical separation (personally and outwardly) and defends the true Gospel as the Apostle Paul received it directly from the Lord Jesus Christ—salvation by Grace, through faith, apart from works (Galatians 1:11–12; Ephesians 2:8–9; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; 2 Corinthians 6:16–18; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:13–15; 1 Timothy 6:12). A Biblicist not only believes in one's divinely-given *free will* to receive or reject Christ, but also a *freed will*, freed from striving to keep the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

The Apostle Paul defends Christ's deity and bodily resurrection as the inseparable core of the Gospel which he received in a vision from the living Christ. This writer believes that Christianity (as we know it), began that Sunday morning in which the tomb was found empty, Christ having completed the justification aspect of our salvation by His bodily resurrection. He was seen first by His closest disciples, i.e., His Apostles in the upper room. He was later seen by over five hundred brethren at once, who saw Christ is His resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). Lastly, Christ was seen by Paul, for which Paul gives his personal testimony before King Agrippa (Acts 26:12–16).

The Apostle John reinforces Paul's account, "We have heard, seen and touched the Word of life" (1 John 1:1–3). There he writes, "I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe in the Name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). Bob Wilkin, Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society, writes, "The teaching that you cannot be sure that Christ died for you is one of the worst false teachings of all time"⁴⁹ (Romans 5:6; 1 Corinthians 15:3).

⁴⁸ Cited from the doctrinal statement summary of Cornerstone Bible Institute School of Biblical Ministries, 2021. <https://www.cornerstonebibleinstitute.com/our-doctrinal-statement/>.

⁴⁹ Robert Wilkin, "Unlimited Atonement," Grace Evangelical Society, January 20 2021, <https://www.faithalone.org/category/blog/page/2/>.

Biblicists also believe that salvation is the gracious gift of God (Romans 6:23) to all mankind, and expressly to all who believe—by Grace, through faith (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:2). Salvation from sin’s judgement and a fully restored relationship with God the Father is gained only through God the Son. It is received by ^(a) heartfelt repentant Faith before God (Acts 20:21), while ^(b) humbly embracing the atoning work of Christ on one’s behalf through simple, unadulterated faith alone, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8). Upon repentance and faith, the lost sinner is born-again spiritually into God’s family of Saints and can never be lost—being kept safe by the power of God until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13–14; 1 Peter 1:5). Salvation is the gift of God. It is not gained or maintained by personal striving (John 4:10; Acts 8:20; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8).

Salvation can be expressed as two sides of a coin (Grace and mercy). Grace (*charis*) is defined as God’s engifting sinners with what they *don’t* deserve (salvation), consisting of eternal life, forgiveness of all sin, and a restored relationship with God the Father. Mercy or compassion (*eleos*) is God’s withholding from sinners that which they *do* deserve, judgement (Christ having paid sin’s price on their behalf, i.e., death), followed by and eternity spent in the *Lake of Fire*—just payment for breaking God’s divine laws (Romans 6:23).

On the other hand, anyone *not* embracing God’s freely offered gift of salvation by Grace through Faith, will ultimately give an account before Him at *The Great White Throne Judgment*. There, every classification of humankind from every era will stand before a righteous and holy God, to be judged, each according to his or her own works, things both seen and unseen. As a final check, if one’s name is *not* found written in *The Lamb’s Book of Life*, he or she will be condemned for their sin by God, the righteous Judge, and escorted by His angels to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire, reserved for Satan and his demons (Revelation 20:11–15). J.B. Hixson, author of *Freely by His Grace*, describes this place of judgement as eternal torment and separation from God and all that is good—the ultimate result of mankind’s enmity with God and their reward for unrepentance and unbelief.⁵⁰

Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians states that everyone who receives Christ is baptized (incorporated *or* placed) into the Body of Christ the moment of salvation—having drunk the *water*

⁵⁰ J.B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire, and Roy B. Zuck, editors, *Freely by His Grace: Classical Grace Theology* (McDonough, GA, Grace Gospel Press, 2012), Kindle ed.: chap. 3, loc. 891–12139.

of life given freely by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 55:1; Revelation 21:6, 22:17). This is the same everlasting water of life, which Christ spoke of to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5–15). “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks [gentiles], whether slaves or free—and have been all *made to drink* into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The term “made to drink” (*potizo*) is in the indicative mood in Greek (informational, not an authoritative edict). Therefore, a more accurate rendering might be, “all have been *given* to drink, or *imbued with*.”⁵¹

Also, the phrase *made (or given) to drink* is in the aorist tense and passive voice. Meaning, it was accomplished *for us*, by God (*once* for all eternity), which reinforces the truth of the security of the believer. Another idea taught by Calvinism is that faith, not eternal life, is the gift of God. Not so. *Eternal life* (as well as the Holy Spirit) is a gift, given as a result of exercising one’s Faith (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:23).⁵² Likewise, the view that the *elect* are regenerated first, before salvation—apart from their free will to accept or reject—is another misconstrued, *cart-before-the-horse* theory not supported anywhere in scripture (Acts 16:30–31, Ephesians 1:12–13).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says that The Book of Revelation presents God’s ultimate victory over Satan.⁵³ In Revelation’s final chapter the offer is repeated: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts ‘Come.’ Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Isaiah 55:1; Revelation 22:17). “Come” in both passages is in the *imperative* mood! The water of eternal life is offered to all, but is only effectual for *whoever* obeys, i.e., comes and drinks. It is an all-encompassing invitation, opposite of Calvinism, which portrays God as withholding the living water from the lost masses—only allowing the previously-chosen *elect* to quench their thirst.

Calvinists claim that the new birth precedes repentance and faith. Yet, they are contradicted by Jesus Christ Himself.⁵⁴ He said, “These are written that ^(a) you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

⁵¹ The word “drink” (*potizo*) is in the aorist, passive, indicative Greek form, meaning “to furnish” or “give to drink.”

⁵² Charles Bing, editor, *Freely by His Grace* (McDonough, GA, Grace Gospel Press, 2012), Kindle ed.: chap. 5, loc. 2284–12139.

⁵³ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), Olive Tree ed., chap. Q 7.

⁵⁴ Brian J. Abasciano, “Does Regeneration Precede Faith? The Use of 1 John 5:1 as a Proof Text,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (October 2012): 307–22, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sdcc.edu: 2443/>.

Son of God, and ^(b) *that believing* ^(c) *you have life* in His name” (John 20:31). Also, note the sequence of events as Paul penned them in Ephesians 1:13: ^(a) They heard the Gospel; ^(b) they believed; ^(c) were saved, and ^(d) were sealed by the Holy Spirit. Bottom line, as born-again believers, we are all saved in the very same way—by Grace, through faith, period—despite the various theories floating around.

Some Calvinists do not believe in the age of accountability in that limited atonement extends to unborn infants or toddlers still in a state of innocence. According to Calvinism, if these little ones are *not* of the *elect*, they are damned for eternity by God’s sovereign design.⁵⁵ In King David’s lament over his dead infant son (2 Samuel 12:22–23), he was confident he would see him again. David believed in the age of accountability and Salvation by Grace through faith for whosoever will come. He wrote: “*For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You*” (Psalms 86:5).

Consider this. If a person espouses and teaches Calvin’s theories of limited atonement and predestination, does that mean that person is one of God’s prechosen *elect*? Conversely, if a person rejects Calvinism, *does that* mean that person is not one of God’s *elect*? How can one know? Furthermore, concerning Calvin’s theories of perseverance, how can one be sure they’re of the *elect*? Not unlike Armenians, how can one be sure they’ve persevered enough to ensure their *election*? No, Calvinism promotes confusion and uncertainty, not confidence. “*God is not the author of confusion, but peace*” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

This writer, being firmly committed to a Biblicist position, believes that embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ (as preached by the Apostle Paul) is the sole condition for receiving the gift of eternal life...by Grace alone, through faith alone, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5). Whereupon, the believer is forthwith saved and forever secure in Christ. That means *anyone* that believes in Jesus Christ, who died a substitutionary death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sin, and rose bodily from the dead to secure our justification (John 3:16–18; 6:47; Acts 16:31; Romans 5.1; Rev 22:17), kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5).⁵⁶ An empty cross, an empty tomb, a living Savior, means salvation full and free, by Grace, through faith!

⁵⁵ Nodal Milieus, *Calvinism Refuted: Questions Reformed Theology Can't Answer* (Seattle: Amazon, 2019), Kindle ed.: 8–9, loc. 175–2357.

⁵⁶ “What We Believe: Affirmations of Belief,” *Grace In Focus Magazine*, Grace Evangelical Society, Denton, TX, 2021. <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/>.

Calvinism's Altered Bible Verses and Misapplied Passages

Ephesians 1:4: Who Is Chosen and for What?

“Just as *He* (the Father) chose *us* (believers) *in Him* (the Son) before the foundation of the world, that *we* (believers) should be holy and without blame before *Him* (the Father) in love” (Ephesians 1:4). This passage is central to Calvin’s doctrines of election, but does it apply? To whom is Paul referring as being chosen? And, in what way? Is this the corporate *Church* (The Body of Christ) being chosen to one-day stand “holy and blameless” before God the Father *in Christ* by Love? Or, is it Calvin’s theory of *elect* individuals being chosen for salvation? Let the Scriptures decide.⁵⁷ For *He, Him, us/we* pronoun clarification see 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Throughout Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, wherever he uses first-person *plural* pronouns (*we, our, or us*), he is always referring to believers in a collective or corporate sense, i.e., the Body of Christ.⁵⁸ Also, wherever Paul uses first-person *singular* pronouns (*I, my or me*), he is referring to himself exclusively. Finally, the Greek term for elect (*ἐκλεκτός*), meaning picked out, selected, or chosen, does *not* occur anywhere in the entire book of Ephesians; however, chosen (*ἐκλέγομαι*) occurs only once, in verse 1:4.

An accurate interpretation of this passage hinges on understanding the implications of the phrase, “*before the foundation of the world.*” This phrase primarily refers to Christ as it is used two other times referring to Christ, *not* to believers (John 17:24 and 1 Peter 1:20).⁵⁹ Yet, it could easily have a dual inclusive meaning, to which this writer concurs. Christ was chosen by The Father before the foundation of the world to provide an atonement for sin (Isaiah 53:6), available for whoever believes (John 3:15-16, 11:26, 12:46). Second, the provision made, The Father also chose that we—the corporate *Body of Christ* and members in particular—inherently unholy and guilty in our depraved sinful state; we would one day stand before God the Father sinless, holy and without blame through His love for us, in Christ; washed in His Blood (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:4b).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical?* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 161–2357.

⁵⁸ A word count in Ephesians in the New King James Bible was done using the popular Bible search program e-Sword®, version 10.4.0, by Rick Meyers, copyright © 2000–2014. The search revealed that the pronouns *we, our, or us* appear 43 times referring to *believers*. Whereas *I, my or me* occur 30 times—used only three times in chap. one, all by Paul referring to himself. This is evidence that Ephesians 1:4 does not refer to individuals being elected.

⁵⁹ This writer did a search for the phrase *before the foundation of the world*, and found it occurred three times in reference to Christ (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4, and 1 Peter 1:20). At no time in Scripture did it refer to persons, individually or collectively.

⁶⁰ Bob Kirkland, *None Dare Call It Heresy* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 6, loc. 388–1755.

Ephesians 2:8–9: Saving Faith or Dead Works?

“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Simply put, *saving faith* is resting in the Name, Person, and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ on one’s behalf, apart from works. Instead of *“rightly dividing the Word of Truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15), Calvinists prefer to insert their own theories to match their beliefs, distorting the original text.

By ignoring the grammatically correct rendering, Calvinists claim that *faith* (not salvation) is the gift of God. This flies in the face of Romans 6:23 which states *“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Thus, exercising *Faith* in Christ brings the gift of salvation. Whereas, relying on perseverance is tantamount to *dead works*, which voids the gift. According to Ephesians 2:10, we are God’s workmanship, *not saved by* good works, but saved into good works, which God ordained to follow salvation as an integral part of a Christian’s life.

Therefore, we do good works because we *are* saved, not to gain salvation (Titus 3:5). Calvinists also believe that the *elect* are *regenerated* with new life first (overriding one’s God-given free will) contrary to the sequence in Ephesians 1:13–14. Calvinists also claim that the faith of *non-elect* persons is works, since their sin was not covered by Calvin’s *limited atonement* theory, leaving them with nothing in which to place their faith. And yet, there is an actual *gift of faith*. It is a spiritual gift spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9, given by the Holy Spirit to believers (as He wills) for the functioning of the Body of Christ. In conclusion, an exegetical look at Ephesians 2:8–9 leaves Calvinist’s claims and theories irrefutably untrue.

John 15:16: I Have Chosen You – For Salvation or Service?

Christ told His disciples: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should...”* Is it true, as Calvinists argue, that this a proof text for unconditional election, apart from human choice? No. Christ explicitly told His disciples that He had chosen them to *“...go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”* That being, the eternal fruit of spreading the Gospel and winning souls for Christ (Proverbs 11:30).

Romans 8:29–30: Predestined – For Salvation or Glorification?

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Paul states here all the good things purposed by God (v. 28) for all who believe. ^(a) (v. 29) We are *Pre-determined* by God’s will to become *Christ-like* as adult sons (Ephesians 1:5). ^(b) (v. 30) We were *Called* to salvation by the Holy Spirit’s conviction upon hearing the Gospel (John 16:8; Romans 10:17; Ephesians 1:13). ^(c) Upon exercising faith, we were *Justified* or declared Righteous (Romans 5:1). Finally, we will be *glorified* to be like Christ when we see Him (1 John 3:2).

Romans 9:11–13: Jacob and Esau – Hellfire or Servitude?

As it is written, “Jacob, I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:13). Is this verse suggesting that God elected Jacob for Heaven and condemned Esau, whom He *hated*, to Hell? No. It refers to two rival nations of whom Jacob and Esau are the progenitors. It begins with their rivalry in the womb (Genesis 25, 27 and Malachi 1:1–5). When Rebecca conceived, she was carrying twin boys, rivals from the onset. God told her, “Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:21–23). The term *hated* does not refer directly to Esau but to his descendants, the Edomites, who greatly displeased the Lord (Malachi 1:4).

1 Timothy 4:10: Salvation – Available for All or Just A Few?

“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” This verse means exactly what it says in a literal sense—*the Savior of all men*... Yet, Reformer John Samson claims it should read: “For this is what we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, *especially of believers*.” Meaning, *the irresistibly elect through limited atonement*, as posted on his “Effectual Grace” web log December 6, 2010.⁶¹

⁶¹ John Samson, “Effectual Grace,” *Effectual Grace* (blog), December 6, 2010, <http://effectualgrace.com/2010/12/06/understanding-1-timothy-410/>.

1 John 2:2: Atonement – Sufficient for All or Just A Few?

“And He Himself is the propitiation (atonement, payment price) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”⁶² By interjecting a personally preferred interpretation into this Biblical text,⁶³ Calvinists contort and redefine its intended meaning into “the whole world ‘*of the Elect*’” to align with their favorite beliefs.⁶⁴

Matthew 13:24-30: The Invisible Church – Are You Wheat or Tare?

To whom was Jesus referring in His parable about the Wheat and the Tares? While returning home from a Bible study-prayer meeting, this writer recently heard R. C. Sproul expound on his understanding of this passage over Christian radio. Sproul introduced more confusion and uncertainty into the minds of the average believer than he did clarity of understanding and confidence in the Lord, because he introduced an entirely new meaning of the *Body of Christ*, calling it the *Invisible Church*.

Sproul continued, saying that which one knows as a solid, conservative, local church of Bible-believing Christians . . . most of them (according to Sproul) are *tares* or “fake wheat.” Meaning, most of these members aren’t of God’s chosen *elect*. Yet, no one can tell because the real *elect* wheat are invisible, existing unbeknown (The Invisible Church) amidst the tare majority. According to him, you and your beloved family, including your unborn infant or darling toddler—even your respected pastor—may be *tares*! Only God knows. All your friends whom you know are saved, with marvelously transformed lives, may be *tares*!

Like this writer; during a time of soul-searching brought about by a deep disappointment, the Spirit of God convicted him of the depths of his lostness in the throes of sin. With the fires of an awaiting eternity in hell looming in his mind, he cried out for mercy. Whereupon, peace flooded his newly-born soul. Now a Bible translator and church planting missionary who has seen many souls saved out of heathen darkness, baptized, and new churches established, this missionary may in fact be a *tare*—according to Sproul’s Reformed theology.

⁶² Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This?: Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2013), Kindle ed.: chap. 16, loc. 6791–14255.

⁶³ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Pub., 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 3, loc. 328–1755.

⁶⁴ From a stated claim by five-point hyper Calvinist Manley Johnson, Venice Baptist Church, Venice Center, NY, 1978.

Evaluating the Evidence

How Does God Save?

The Blood of Christ saves us. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). Mankind’s lifeblood is tainted by sin from the Fall. Christ’s blood is spotless, shed for us as a willing sacrifice, making it possible for all mankind, everywhere, to be saved from sin (Isaiah 53:6; 1 Timothy 4:10; 1 Peter 1:18–21). Christ then rose bodily by the power of God (Acts 2:24). Henceforth, God saves all repentant sinners who come *by His Grace, through our Faith* (Ephesians 2:8). Also, contrary to Calvinist’s claims, *Eternal Life* is the *gift* of God, not our faith, which must be exercised to be saved (Romans 6:23).

Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), shed His Blood as the atoning price for all sin, satisfying the demands of God’s righteous wrath (Isaiah 53:6; Colossians 2:13–14; 1 John 2:1–2). He then rose for our justification (Romans 4:25). The price paid; God can forgive and *save to the uttermost* every sinner who comes in repentant Faith (Acts 20:21). Note the sequence in Ephesians 1:13; hearing and believing *precede* the new birth (not vice-versa). Also, in the Gospel of John: “These are written that ^(a) you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and ^(b) that believing, you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

God does not save us from judgement by keeping His Laws, and never did. He gave them to reveal sin (1 Timothy 1:8–10). God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites by Moses on Mount Sinai—where they claimed they would gladly do whatever God desired. By giving the Law, God showed them His absolute holiness and righteousness, while revealing how desperately wicked they were (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10–12). Being depraved (as are we) they were unable to meet God’s righteous requirements. Whereupon God, in His Love, initiated the archetype animal sacrifice system at the Fall (Genesis 3:21), done to cover their sins in the interim until “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” would come (John 1:29; Ephesians 2:8–9).

The Apostle Paul went into explicit detail in Galatians how God gave the Law as a stern tutor or school master (Galatians 3:23–25), to drive us to the Cross of Christ for forgiveness of sin and a fully restored relationship with God. We are justified fully by faith and are acceptable in His sight *by Grace, through faith alone*, apart from the Law (Romans 5:1, 8:1). All mankind, is spiritually (*not physically*) dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1); as such, we are totally unable to save our depraved selves from God’s judgement (or help Him out), especially by trying to keep the works of the Law (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16, 3:10).

To What Does the Term Predestine Refer?

Dr. Bob Kirkland, in his book *None Dare Call It Heresy* defines what the term predestine *does not* refer. He quotes John Calvin's view of salvation as Calvin perceives it; Calvin writes:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regards to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.⁶⁵

Does Scripture teach that only a prechosen few are predestined to be saved as Calvin suggests? No. It reveals God's predetermined redemptive plan to justify, sanctify and glorify whosoever believes (Romans. 10:11; John. 3:16; Ephesians. 1:1–14).⁶⁶ "For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to be *conformed* to the image of His Son [Sanctification]" (Romans 8:29). "When He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is [Glorification]" (1 John 3:2). Ephesians 1:4 clearly states that God chose redemption's plan before He founded the world, not to save preselected individuals, but that "we [who trust in Christ] should be holy and without blame before Him in Love [Glorification]."

God, as part of our eternal heritage in Christ, also "*predestined* us to be adopted as sons unto Himself, by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5). As full-fledged sons, God has "qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12). *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, defines the Scriptural meaning of the term *Adoption* as having complete sonship status in God's family, possessing all rights and privileges.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2018), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 95–1755.

⁶⁶ Leighton Flowers, *The Potter's Promise: A Biblical Defense of Traditional Soteriology* (Evansville, IN, Trinity Academic Press. 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc. 175–3050

⁶⁷ David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). Olive Tree ed.: Adoption.

To What Does the Term Election Refer?

Shawn Lazar wrote in his book *Why Biblical Election Is to Service and Not to Eternal life*, that “There isn’t a single verse in the Bible that says God elects individuals for eternal life or for eternal death.”⁶⁸ *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* describes the Greek word for election and chosen (*eklegomai*) as meaning to *pick* or to *choose*.⁶⁹ Its primary usage is in describing God’s initiative in choosing a people, or individuals, for his purposes. For the believer, election is for service, not eternal life, or death.⁷⁰ The Greek term for church is *ekklesia* meaning *a gathering of called out ones*.⁷¹ Hence, the Church is the collective body of called out ones (the *elect* Body of Christ) which Paul refers to in the book of Ephesians using the plural form “us” or “we” 39 times total, and three times *us* and *we* collectively in one sentence.

Therefore, as defined biblically, election means that God chose certain eras, things, groups, or individuals for a particular purpose or assignment, according to His sovereign predetermined design. How should the sovereignty of God and His divine election be understood compared to the doctrine of human free will?⁷² God does not elect individuals for salvation—overriding their ability to choose as He created them—but He receives all, according to *whoever will, may come* (Isaiah 55:1; Revelation 21:6, 22:17). Furthermore, if people were absolutely elected to spend eternity either in Heaven or Hell, overriding their free will—as in Calvinism’s *Unconditional Election* theory—why then did Isaiah prophesy saying: “Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7)?

⁶⁸ Shawn Lazar, *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc., 387-3461.

⁶⁹ David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). Olive Tree ed.: Election.

⁷⁰ ———, *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: intro., loc., 387-3461.

⁷¹ ———, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). Olive Tree ed.: Church.

⁷² Harold Wells, “The Sovereignty and Self-Limitation of God: Biblical and Theological Reflections on Providence,” *Touchstone* 36, no. 2 (June 2018): 6–17, Atla Serials.

Concerning *Angels*: God elected His angels to serve as divine messengers and guardians in both heavenly and earthly assignments. “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21).

Concerning *Israel*: God elected them as His chosen people, from whom the *Messiah* was born of the tribe of Judah.⁷³ “For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me” (Isaiah 55:4).

Concerning *Believers (The Church)*: God elected before the foundation of the world that they would one day stand before God as *holy* and *blameless*, accepted through His love as revealed in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28–30; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:23), having responded to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (repentance or change of mind) and embraced (place one’s trust in) the Christ of the Gospel message, in accordance with John 16:8 and Acts 20:21.

Concerning *Individuals*: Paul was chosen (elected) directly by the Lord Jesus Christ, who said to Ananias concerning Paul, “he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15)

Concerning *Calvinists*: This writer is convinced that anyone holding to a Reformed doctrinal position, that *not one* of them was ever saved following the manner their TULIP doctrine of election suggests, but by God’s Grace, through faith, apart from works as one of the *whomsoever will*, just like everyone else who is a born-again child of God—if, in fact they are saved (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Concerning *Jesus Christ*: First, Jesus is the *Christ*, meaning the anointed *chosen* Messiah. Also, as Peter preached to the multitudes in Acts, although Christ’s crucifixion was arranged by hateful Jewish religious leaders (John 18:14); Christ was *chosen* to be slain according to the predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge of God as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Acts 2:23; Ephesians 1:4).

⁷³ Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical?* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: appx. B, loc. 1888–2357.

Conclusion

Are John Calvin's doctrines of Sovereign Grace contrary to the Gospel? ...nowadays defined as Covenant theology. However, this author believes this paper demonstrates that Calvinism's *doctrines of Grace*—as seen in his thesis, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—clearly contradict the Word of God and the true Gospel that Paul preached. They are merely a theory Calvin proposed as to how he perceived God's plan of Salvation; which, when examined, lacks any real Scriptural basis. This writer holds to a *Biblicist* position,⁷⁴ not Arminian or Calvinist—meaning to believe in the ultimate authority of rightly divided Scripture, the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15),⁷⁵ understood in a literal and logical sense; historically grammatically, and exegetically interpreted as defined in Thiselton's *Systematic Theology*.⁷⁶

This writer's views also concur with those of Dr. Curtis Hutson. Hutson quantifies the meaning of Biblicist and gives a pertinent definition of Calvinism's inherent weaknesses at the conclusion of his publication: *Why I Disagree with All Five Points of Calvinism*:

I am neither Arminian nor Calvinist! I believe in salvation by Grace through Faith in the finished work of Christ! I believe in the eternal security of the believer! I believe that Jesus Christ died for all men, and I believe what the Bible says, "*That whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"

It is true that God foreknows everything that will happen in the world. It is true that God ordained and determined some events ahead of time and selected some individuals for His purposes. It is certain that people are saved by Grace, and are kept by the power of God. That far, Calvinists may well prove their doctrines by the Scriptures. But beyond that, Calvinism goes into a realm of human philosophy.

No, Calvinism is *not* a *bona fide* Bible doctrine It is especially appealing to the scholarly intellect, the self-sufficient and proud mind. Brilliant, philosophical, scholarly preachers are apt to be misled on this matter more than the humble-hearted, Bible-believing Christian.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Wilkin, *Is Calvinism Biblical?* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017), Kindle ed.: chap. 1, loc. 236–2357.

⁷⁵ Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Pub., 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 1, loc. 107–4152.

⁷⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), chap. 1, loc. 10. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sdcc.edu: 2443/>.

⁷⁷ Curtis Hutson, *Why I Disagree with All Five Points of Calvinism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1980), loc. 20.

As Kirkland states in *None Dare Call It Heresy*, John Calvin's views on who can be saved (and how) are what many would see as *heretical*,⁷⁸ including this writer. And yet, there are many otherwise honorable people (Calvinism's proponents) who passionately embrace and teach the same theology as Calvin in direct contradiction to the Gospel of Grace—which the Apostle Paul preached and died defending.

Be assured that if the Apostle Paul were present, he would quickly decry each of Calvinism's five-point TULIP theory as being *another gospel*—which he called accursed by God (Galatians 1:8-9). On what authority might Paul speak? The great Apostle did not receive *his* Gospel passed down to him through men (like John Calvin), as they perceived it to be, or formulate it from his own studies, but the Lord Jesus Christ personally entrusted him with it through a vision (1 Corinthians 9:16–18; 15:1–10; Galatians 1:11).

Do you know anyone confused or being misled by the belief system known as Calvinism or Reformed? It can sound quite convincing if not debunked by the *rightly divided* study of Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15), which most suitably defines the theological view of dispensationalism, which is both biblically sound and practical, distinguishing between the various time periods or ages on God's calendar.⁷⁹ Meaning, the study God's Word for correct understanding in a literal and logical sense, as it was intended by God, its original author—historically, grammatically, and exegetically interpreted.

This method (*hermeneutical exegesis*) is the correct way to interpret scripture, since it is the best means available to extract the true intended meaning. Whereas, Calvinism's proponents insert totally different meanings (*eisegesis*). In doing so, they knowingly contort the original meaning of the Gospel Paul preached, transforming it into *another gospel*—an altogether different message which the Apostle Paul condemns.

As Paul, the last and arguably the greatest Apostle exclaims in a moment of exhilarating gratitude; he recalls how Christ graciously saved and chose him for service that day on the road to Damascus (1 Timothy 1:12–15); transforming him from a lost, self-righteous, Christian-hating Pharisee to knowing his Messiah personally and intimately as his Creator, Lord, and Savior. Paul praises God with these words:

“Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? ...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:33–36).

⁷⁸ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Pub., 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 6, loc. 764–1755.

⁷⁹ David E Walker, *Rightly Dividing the Bible, Vol. One: The Basics and Background of Dispensationalism* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2018), Kindle ed.: chap. 6, loc. 231–4459.

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