



Christian Resources and Links

Doctrine

What's Wrong With Five-Point Calvinism?

by Paul L. Freeman

He loves me -- loves me not

There is a system of teaching abroad today which is infecting our fundamental churches, Bible institutes, Christian colleges, and seminaries. It is known as Five-Point Calvinism and originated with John Calvin's interpretation of the Word of God. The fearsome thing about it is its spread into fundamental churches and schools with little opposition. It appears that the proponents of Neo-evangelicalism, with their criticism of Fundamentalists for their supposed "lack of scholarship toward the Word of God," have had a great influence. As this system of false doctrines spreads into the last strongholds of Biblical Christianity there is a silence when there should be a resounding reply from the Word of God by Pastors and Teachers. The intellectualism of this system of teaching seems to have cast a spell over our leaders and the will to resist is stifled for fear of saying something non-intellectual. In that which follows I urge you to compare the Five-Points of Calvinism with the Word of God and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth.

Concerning the Five-Points of Calvinism, Loraine Boettner has stated on p. 59 of his book, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, "prove any one of them true and all of the others will follow as logical and necessary parts of the system. Prove any one of them false and the whole system must be abandoned." Since Mr. Boettner is considered an authority on the subject, I would encourage you to follow his advice and abandon the system when you find one of the Five-Points to be wrong. The Five-Points of Calvinism are as follows:

- 1. Total inability**
- 2. Unconditional election**
- 3. Limited atonement**
- 4. Irresistible grace**
- 5. Perseverance of the saints**

It is not the purpose of this paper to present an exhaustive study of these points and to examine the Scriptures used by Calvinists to prove their system of teaching. Rather, this study is set forth for the Christian believer who wants to know, very simply stated, what these Five Points are and whether they are in agreement with all the Scriptures.

Total Inability

The teaching of Five-Point Calvinism is that man is totally unable to do anything to obtain salvation. They state very emphatically that he cannot repent or believe the Gospel. Their teaching is that man cannot believe until he is born again. This new birth is brought about by God who chooses certain individuals and regenerates them. Those whom He regenerates are then capable of believing by virtue of their new birth. Man does not have a free will by which he is able to come to Christ for salvation.

Concerning the statement that man cannot repent we find the Word of God stating the exact

opposite. In Acts 17:30 we find that God commands all men everywhere to repent, and that having so commanded, He expects they can and will. In 2 Peter 3:9 we find that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. If they should come, then they can come. God does not mock men by asking them to do what they cannot do. In Acts 11:18 we are told that God hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life. Notice that the repentance comes first and it results in life.

Concerning the statement that man cannot believe the Gospel, and that man cannot believe until his is born again, let the following Scripture be studied- John 1:12, 3:15, 16, 36, 5:24, 6:40, 7:39, 12:36, and 20:31. These Scriptures all show that spiritual life follows upon the sinner's believing in Jesus Christ. The Apostle John gave as his reason for writing his gospel, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through His name." It is very clear that believing comes first and new birth follows. The verses I have cited from the Gospel of John by no means exhausts the Scripture which prove life through believing. If you will take Strong's Concordance and study the words "believe, believed, and believeth" you will find much more. A notable example is Acts 16:31 where Paul said, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The Calvinist would twist it to read, "when thou art saved by the Lord Jesus Christ thou shalt believe." What utter disregard for the plain teaching of the Word of God.

Concerning the statement that man does not have a free will by which he is able to come to Christ, please note what Jesus said in John 7:17: "if any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine." Here He said that a man may will to do God's will. Again in John 5:40 Jesus rebuked the Jews when He said "ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." It was not that they could not come, but that they would not come. In Rev. 22:17 the Word of God declares "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Here God makes a real offer of the water of life to "WHOSOEVER WILL."

Beloved, God has been pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:21). Salvation is by believing, and if we tell the lost man that he cannot believe, we shut the gates of Heaven against him and find ourselves in the hideous company of him who "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ Who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4)

Unconditional Election

The teaching of Five-Point Calvinism is that God has determined and decreed that some are to be saved without any conditions to be met on their part. This is called Unconditional election and is the choosing of some to salvation in Christ, while at the same time leaving the rest in their lost condition by not choosing them. This election is not based on God's foreknowing that certain would believe, but is based on His sovereign will to elect certain ones. Those who are not chosen to be part of the Elect of God can in no way enter into that company. In line with this teaching the statement is made that God does not love all men, but only those whom he has chosen to be saved.

The Scriptures are very plain that God has His Elect ones who by faith in Jesus Christ are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). They are adopted by God and Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4,5). This election is plainly declared to be based on the foreknowledge of God (1 Peter 1:2 and Rom. 8:29). Since God knows the end from the beginning He foreknows those who will believe in Christ. He has purposed that they will be to the praise of His glory throughout the ages and through them He will show the exceeding riches of His grace (Eph. 2:7)

The Scriptures are also very plain in stating that "whosoever will" may come to Christ. Please

read the following Scriptures- John 3:15,16, 4:14, 12:46, Acts 2:21, 10:43, Rom. 10:13, Rev. 22:17. The word "whosoever" means all, any, every, the whole. Since we believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Word of God we are forced to believe that when God moves the Scripture writers to say "whosoever," then that is exactly what He means. That there is a condition to be met in order for one to be saved is proved by our Lord's words in John 8:24 "for if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins." Other Scriptures have already been quoted under Total Inability to bear out the conditional requirement of believing in order to have salvation.

That God loves all men in this world and sent His Son to die for them is abundantly clear from John 3:16. The Five-Point Calvinist changes the meaning of the word "world" here and adds to the Word of God by placing immediately behind it two words, "the elect." The verse then appears this way, "For God so loved the world (the elect) that He gave His only begotten Son, etc." I have seen this verse written in this way in gospel tracts. The word "world" is used 77 times in the Gospel of John. I would encourage you to take Strong's Concordance and look up each occurrence, then insert the words "the elect" behind each usage of it. You do not have to go far before you see how ridiculous it is.

You see, beloved, if God does not love all men then we should not love them either. Since our Christian character comes from the indwelling of our Lord, we cannot show forth an attribute that is superior to His. Yet strangely enough, the Word of God says we are to love our enemies, our wives, our husbands, our children. If we must love lost sinners, and our Lord is holier than we are, we must believe that He loves them too. I'll believe John 3:16 as it stands unaltered by the followers of John Calvin.

Limited Atonement

The Five-Point Calvinist states that Christ died on the Cross for the sins of the Elect. To say that He died for the sins of the non-elect is not reasonable. Since, according to their system, God has chosen some to be saved and chosen the rest to be lost, He cannot require the death of Christ for those He does not plan to save anyhow. Therefore the Atonement of Christ is limited to the Elect only.

If you have accepted Total Inability and Unconditional Election it is necessary to limit the scope of Christ's death on Calvary. The only problem is that the Scriptures directly state that the death of Christ was for every man and is effective for the sinner the moment he believes. In 1 John 2:2 it is said that His death was a propitiation (satisfaction) not only for our sins but for the sins of "the whole world." In Hebrews 2:9 it says that Christ tasted death for "every man." 1 Tim. 2:6 says that He gave Himself a ransom for "all." John the Baptist declared in John 1:29 that Jesus was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the "world." In Isaiah 53:6 the Word of God states that "all" have gone astray (I would assume that refers to all men in the world) and that the Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity of us "all." Since the Gospel is for "whosoever will" and it consists of the good news that Christ died for sinners, I must believe that the Atonement of Christ is not limited.

Not only is the Atonement of Christ unlimited and offered to all men, but the Holy Spirit is presently working to convict the world (all men) of one sin. That sin is that Christ paid the penalty for their sins, but they do not believe on Him (John 16:8,9). God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9) and it is said that He will have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). In Scripture we find the Father giving the Son to the world, the Son tasting death for every man, and the Holy Spirit convicting the world. Since God's work must be our work, we should part company with Five-Point Calvinism right here. The Bible knows nothing of a limited Atonement: that comes from the vain intellectual reasoning of men.

Irresistible Grace

Calvinists teach that all those whom God has chosen to be saved will be unable to resist the call of God. Since He has predetermined them to be saved, He effectually calls and regenerates them without any condition to be met on their part.

The Word of God teaches that the Grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). Since God has provided salvation for all men, and yet all do not come; that is proof enough that men do resist the Grace of God. The Bible gives clear instances of men resisting the Grace of God. Jesus stood over Jerusalem and said that He wanted to gather them unto Himself, but they would not (Matt. 23:37). When Stephen preached to the Jews he said that regarding their attitude toward God's Word they were stiff-necked and that they were resisting the Holy Spirit Who was calling them (Acts 7:51). The writer of Hebrews, when describing those who draw back unto perdition (Heb. 10:39), said that though they were sanctified by the blood of Christ, yet they had done despite unto the Spirit of Grace (Heb. 10:28,29). Here it is plain that the blood of Christ was available to them for salvation, but was refused. That the Spirit of God strives with sinners to bring them to repentance and faith is stated in Gen. 6:3. This verse also states that God will one day give man up when His grace is continually resisted.

Perseverance of the Saints

The last point in the Calvinist system of teaching is that those whom God has chosen to be saved will persevere to the end and will not finally and fully depart from the faith. The one who is truly born again is eternally secure in Christ and is never in danger of losing his salvation.

Most Fundamentalists would find little to disagree with in this statement, except to qualify the way God chooses men to be saved by stating that His Election is according to His foreknowledge. The eternal security of the believer is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture. However, the false teaching set forth under the first four points of Calvinism bear their inevitable fruit here. There is a subtle exclusion here which is not seen in the stated position, but which eventually shows up in practice. In churches where these doctrines are taught there are the following effects on those who come into the assembly:-

1. The man who is under the conviction of the Spirit and on the threshold of believing in Christ is soon hearing that he cannot of himself believe and unless God has chosen him to salvation there is nothing he can do.
2. The one who has been born again, but is still a babe in Christ, is often expected to exhibit a spiritual life more advanced than his growth to date. Because the fruit is slow in coming he begins to doubt whether he is truly born again. Thus, one who is a child of God begins to doubt that he is a true believer and sits at home in absolute frustration, convinced that God has not chosen him.
3. Those who are saved and living a spiritual life begin to develop an intellectual superiority over those who cannot see the glorious truths revealed by John Calvin. Since they are the Elect of God and the unsaved are the Non-Elect whom God does not love, they begin to display a self-righteous attitude toward those lost in sin. The attitude of the Jews toward the Gentiles, whom they referred to as "dogs," begins to come into the life of the Calvinist. It is the attitude displayed by John Calvin when he desired the death penalty to be pronounced upon Servetus. John Calvin handled the theological part of the trial of Servetus, who was subsequently burned at the stake for blasphemy.

The usage of the phrase "perseverance of the saints" gives the impression that the saints are doing

something to keep themselves secure in their salvation. A more Scriptural phrase would seem to be the "preservation of the Saints" (1 Thess. 5:23; Jude 1). Beloved, inquire of your Bible teacher regarding Calvinism. Do not be satisfied with a "purposely evasive" answer. The man who holds these teachings usually will not be a soul-winner or be mission minded. If your church has no outreach for the lost it may well be that Five-Point Calvinism has already done it's deadly work.

Used with permission of: Paul L. Freeman, 1920 Verbena St., Pekin, IL 61554

[Back to Doctrine Resources](#)

Copyright ©2002 [Wholesome Words](#). All Rights Reserved.