

Introduction:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (**Ephesians 2:8-9**).<sup>1</sup> I want to preach this passage without reservation. I want to proclaim it without caveat. I want to boldly shout it from the mountaintops without fear that someone will ask me to reign it in and be careful lest I take the message of this passage too far. The teaching of salvation by grace cannot be taken too far. It can be perverted. It can be twisted. It can be distorted. But it cannot be taken too far. I want to publicize the message of this verse boldly and loudly without fear that someone will shout it down saying I need to make sure to balance its message with the message of some other passage. The teaching of salvation by grace does not need to be balanced with some other message as if it is a weight on the end of a seesaw that needs to be kept on center by some other teaching. Yes, someone may have an imbalanced view of grace. Yes, the teaching of grace needs to be properly understood. But the true teaching of grace will never throw anyone out of balance and will never throw the doctrine of Christ out of balance. I want to be known as a preacher and proclaimer of God’s grace. And the purpose of this lesson is to help you to be as well.

But there is a fear. There is a fear that we all have whenever grace gets preached. What causes that fear? Calvinism. Not necessarily everything John Calvin taught, but the doctrinal package summed up in the TULIP called Calvinism. The Reformed doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, hearkening back to Augustinianism, have indeed twisted, distorted, and perverted the doctrine of God’s grace, sometimes subtly, sometimes brazenly. And while I am willing to concede someone can philosophically and ideologically accept the tenets of Calvinism but practically obey the gospel and follow the pattern of sound doctrine, most (if not all) are led into practical error when they accept this theological perspective. Sadly, because of the pervasiveness of these perversions, because of the bitter attacks truth and preachers of truth have often experienced from the keyboards of Calvinists, and because of the dangers of Calvinism (some legitimate and some only perceived) many gospel preachers and Christians fear talking about our salvation by grace. Some fear making a mistake and teaching error themselves (no doubt a sound fear). Others fear merely being labeled a false teacher. In any event, through this fear we often leave the teaching of grace up to either false teachers or over reactors. I want to be known as a preacher who does not accept Calvinism, but instead teaches against it. And the purpose of this lesson is to help you to be as well.

Please see both sides presented above. I refuse to accept and teach Calvinism. At the same time, I refuse to be so scared of Calvinism or being labeled a Calvinist that I neglect teaching God’s grace and salvation by it. I want to rely on God’s grace without becoming a Calvinist, and I want to help you do the same.

Discussion:

I. Salvation: breaking free from a one-dimensional definition.

- A. Before we can consider either the Bible’s teaching on salvation by grace or Calvin’s, we should perhaps define salvation. A great deal of misunderstanding regarding grace and salvation by it can be resolved if we clarify salvation’s meaning.
- B. We must not have a one-dimensional view of salvation, as so many seem to have, equating “salvation” or “saved” with “going to heaven.”
  1. Some almost seem to read passages like **Mark 16:16** as if they merely say, “Whoever believes and is baptized will go to heaven.” Or **Acts 2:21** and **Romans 10:13**, “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall go to heaven.” Or **Acts 16:30**, “Sirs, what must I do to go to heaven?” Or **Ephesians 2:8**, “For by grace you go to heaven through faith.”
  2. No doubt, the home and eternal destiny of the saved is heaven. After all, our citizenship is in heaven, from which we await our Savior (**Philippians 3:20**). Our inheritance is reserved and kept in heaven (**I Peter 1:4**). Surely **I Corinthians 5:5** tends toward seeing heaven as part of our salvation as opposed to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright© 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

destruction and eternal damnation of hell. **James 5:20** speaks of saving a *soul* from death which certainly causes us to think in terms of hell and heaven at the end. However, if this is all the meaning we give “salvation,” our view is one-dimensional and limited.

3. Because many Christians have this one-dimensional view of salvation, they struggle with the doctrines of grace. If being saved is equivalent to going to heaven, “saved by grace” sounds like people can go to heaven while still devoting their lives to and pursuing sin. But a fuller and multi-dimensional understanding of salvation demonstrates that is impossible.
4. Consider some definitions of σώζω.
  - a) BDAG: “1. To preserve or rescue fr. natural dangers and afflictions... a. save from death... c. save/free from disease... d. keep, preserve in good condition...e. pass. thrive, prosper, get on well... 2. To save or preserve from transcendent danger or destruction, save/preserve from eternal death fr. judgment and fr. all that might lead to such death, e.g. sin.”
  - b) Louw-Nida: “to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well being-‘to deliver, to rescue, to make safe, deliverance.”
  - c) Thayer: “to save, to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction...to make well, heal, restore to health”
5. Because Christians speak so often of salvation and being saved, it has become almost a technical term as if it’s only meaning “in church” is going to heaven. But it was a word that had a non-religious significance first and was adopted and adapted to the spiritual significance because of parallel ideas.
6. There are two significant scriptural aspects of “saved,” “salvation,” and “savior” that fit in with the above definitions which we need to keep in mind.
  - a) **Judges** provides a great example of one biblical dimension of salvation.
    - (1) **Judges 2:16**: “Then the LORD raised up judges who saved (LXX-ἔσωσεν) them out of the hand of those who plundered them.”
    - (2) **Judges 2:18**: “Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved (LXX-ἔσωσεν) them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge.”
    - (3) **Judges 3:9**: “But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer (LXX-σωτήρα) for the people of Israel, who saved (LXX-ἔσωσεν) them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.”
      - (a) Interestingly, not only is this a picture of Israel being saved, God raised up a savior (from σωτήρ) to save them.
    - (4) **Judges 3:15**: “Then the people cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up a deliverer (LXX-σωτήρα), Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.” (See 3.a above)
    - (5) **Judges 3:31**: “After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved (LXX-ἔσωσεν) Israel.”
    - (6) **Judges 10:12-14**: “The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved (LXX-ἔσωσα) you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save (LXX-σωσαι) you no more. Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save (LXX-σωσάτωσαν) you in the time of your distress.”
    - (7) You can consider further passages: **Judges 6:14, 15, 36, 37; 7:2, 7; 8:22; 10:1; 12:2; 13:5.**
    - (8) This consistent use of “save” and “savior” in **Judges** can be seen elsewhere in the Old Testament. Clearly, it doesn’t speak of “going to heaven” and isn’t actually used in a strictly spiritual or religious sense. Salvation was a deliverance from the hands of enemies and oppressors. A savior was the person God raised up to bring about that deliverance.
    - (9) Who is our enemy but Satan? What oppresses and attacks us but sin? “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (**II Timothy 2:25-26**). Salvation is not merely going to heaven, it is being set free from captivity to the devil and his sinful will.
    - (10) And so passages like **Matthew 1:21** explain that Jesus “will save his people from their sins.” This doesn’t merely mean saved from the consequences of sin, but delivered from the oppression of sin in our lives. We gain victory over sin by grace.

- (11) When we grasp this, we see that being saved by grace cannot possibly mean going to heaven despite continuing to devote our lives to sin and the will of the devil. It means by the grace and gift of God we are set free from doing the devil's will and gain the victory to do God's will.
- b) The miracle accounts of the New Testament provide a wonderful picture of salvation.
- (1) **Matthew 9:20-21:** "And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will be made well (σωθήσομαι).'"
  - (2) **Mark 5:22-23:** "Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well (σωθῆ) and live.'"
  - (3) **Mark 6:56:** "And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well (ἐσώζοντο)."
  - (4) **Luke 8:50:** "But Jesus on hearing this answered him, 'Do not fear; only believe, and she will be made well (σωθήσεται).'"
  - (5) **John 11:12:** "The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover (σωθήσεται).'"
  - (6) **Acts 14:8-9:** "Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well (σωθῆναι)..."
  - (7) Other examples could be demonstrated.
  - (8) We see in these examples a medical aspect of the words "salvation" and "saved." In fact, most of our translations don't even translate the words "saved" in these cases because they see them as examples of recovery from sickness or even physical death in the case of Jairus's daughter.
  - (9) To be certain we are not committing some kind of exegetical fallacy by relating this use of "saved" and "salvation" to our spiritual salvation, note two very important examples of this.
    - (a) Note the parallel between the woman with the issue of blood and the sinful woman who washed Jesus's feet.
      - (i) In **Luke 8:43-48**, a physically sick woman pushes her way through a crowd in order to touch Jesus's garment. She is certain if she does, she will be healed, and she is. Once Jesus calls her to admit what she has done, He says to her, according to the ESV, "Your faith has made you well; go in peace." In Greek: ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην.
      - (ii) In **Luke 7:36-50**, a spiritually sick woman "pushes" her way into a meal while Jesus is reclining at table in Simon the Pharisee's house. An altercation ensues between Jesus and Simon regarding this woman, in which Jesus talks about sin and forgiveness and ultimately tells the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." The account concludes when Jesus says to her, according to the ESV, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." In Greek: ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε· πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην.
      - (iii) The English translations might cause us to miss this parallel. But Jesus actually said the exact same thing to both women. Clearly, physical salvation/healing parallels spiritual salvation/healing.
    - (b) Note the healing of the lame man and Peter's explanation of it in **Acts 3-4**.
      - (i) In **Acts 3:6-8**, Peter commanded a lame man to rise up and walk. The man went walking and leaping and praising God. As the crowds rushed to witness, hear about, and understand what was going on with this healed man, the priests, captain of the temple, and Sadducees came upon Peter and John and arrested them (**Acts 4:1-3**).
      - (ii) On the next day, they asked Peter and John, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (**Acts 4:7**). Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," responded: "Rulers, of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed (σέσωται), let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man

is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation (σωτηρία—a different but related word to σώζω) in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (σωθῆναι)” (**Acts 4:8-12**).

- (iii) Peter’s play on words is clear, relating the two definitions of σώζω to each other. There is no name under heaven other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth by which men can be physically healed, made well, restored to health, made whole. In like manner, there is no name under heaven other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth by which men can be spiritually healed, made well, restored to health, made whole.
  - (iv) What is our spiritual sickness other than sin? As **Mark 2:17** demonstrates: “And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Also **Matthew 9:11-12; Luke 5:31-32**).
- (10) When we grasp this, we see that being saved by grace does not possibly mean going to heaven despite continuing to devote our lives to sin. Wrapped up in salvation is being healed and made whole from our sickness of sin. It is not merely being forgiven of sin, but being set free from sin. It is not merely avoiding the consequences of sin, it is removing sin. It is not keeping the cancer, but never dying. It is having the cancer go into remission and overcoming the sickness.
- (11) Taken a step further, the salvation Jairus’s daughter had from death calls to mind **Ephesians 2:1ff**. “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” We were dead in sin, but salvation saves us from that death and restores us to life. Again, this is so much more than being saved from the consequences of sin while continuing to devote our lives to sin. This is gaining victory over sin itself.
7. Thinking of salvation as merely equivalent to going to heaven is one-dimensional. If we will ever be free to speak of being saved by grace without reservation and constant caveat we must first understand the multi-faceted nature of salvation, seeing the bigger picture. We don’t simply go to heaven by grace, we are delivered from our oppressor Satan, set free from the captivity of doing his will, and healed from the cancer and corruption of sin. That happens by grace.

## II. A picture of grace

- A. Before we consider what Calvin or Calvinism teaches about grace and what dangers these teachings may pose, let’s see a picture of grace by which we can judge Calvin’s teaching and ours. Illustrations always fail at some point. After all, if the illustration exactly pictured the target, it probably wouldn’t be an illustration, it would be the same thing. However, this illustration comes very close to the target of our present salvation by God’s grace.
- B. Consider the following parallels between Israel’s victory in the Promised Land and our own salvation.
  - 1. Israel could not fight or earn their way to victory; neither can we
    - a) In **Numbers 14**, 10 spies brought back a bad report to Israel. They had misunderstood their mission. Rather than reporting on the kind of land God was giving them, they reported on whether or not they thought Israel could win the battles. God punished the spies and sentenced the nation to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation died out.
    - b) In **Numbers 14:39-45**, the Israelites attempted to take the land anyway. Moses discouraged them, letting them know God was not going with them. They went to the battle, but neither Moses nor the Ark of the Covenant went with them. Once again, they misunderstood what they had been told. They seemed to think they had been told they were strong enough to take the land. Surely they could defeat these Amalekites. After all, they had already defeated Amalekites before (**Exodus 17:8-13**). However, they hadn’t been told they were strong enough, they had been told their God was strong enough. They had not believed Him or obeyed Him, so the one who could win the battle didn’t go with them. No matter how hard Israel fought, they would not, in fact, could not win the victory.
    - c) In like manner, we cannot win the victory over sin. No matter how hard we fight or what weapons we bring to bear in our battle for victory over sin, we will ultimately fail. That is the point Paul makes in **Romans 7:14-24**. By himself, no matter how much he wanted to win the battle or how hard he tried, he ultimately failed. This is not to say that he never did anything good or that he never avoided

anything sinful. In fact, the same person who wrote **Romans 7:14-24** also wrote **Philippians 3:6** claiming to blameless where the law was concerned. Thus, no matter how logical we may think it is that if we can defeat discrete instances of sin, we are also able to defeat sin, Paul says otherwise. In like manner, no matter how logical we think it is to say that if we cannot defeat sin, we cannot defeat even discrete instances of sin, Paul says otherwise. Further, his life exemplifies this. We cannot fight or earn our way to victory.

2. God had already won the victory for Israel; He has already won the victory for us.
  - a) There is no doubt God was going to win the victory for Israel. There is no doubt God was going to give Israel the land. However, God says something interesting well before Israel had entered the land.
    - (1) **Numbers 20:12**: “And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe in me to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.’”
    - (2) **Numbers 20:24**: “Let Aaron be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land that I have given to the people of Israel, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah.”
    - (3) **Numbers 27:12**: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel.’”
    - (4) **Deuteronomy 12:1**: “These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.”
    - (5) Though Israel had not yet raised a finger to take the Promised Land proper, God said He had already given it to them.
  - b) This was similar language which God used repeatedly in encouraging Israel to fight the battles He had for them.
    - (1) **Numbers 21:33-34**: “Then they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. But the LORD said to Moses, ‘Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people, and his land.’”
    - (2) **Joshua 2:9**: “And [Rahab] said to the men, ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.’”
    - (3) **Joshua 2:24**: “And they said to Joshua, ‘Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.’”
    - (4) **Joshua 8:1**: “And the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land.’” (Interestingly, the first time Israel went against Ai, they were defeated, but now they are told God has already won the victory.)
    - (5) In each case, the people had not yet won the battles, but God said He had already won the victory. He had already given them the victory.
  - c) Lest we think this is merely a matter of prophetic certainty, that is, God knowing this generation was actually going to inhabit the land so He spoke of it as if it were already done, consider when Moses recounted to Israel what happened with the first generation that did not actually inhabit the land.
    - (1) **Numbers 32:7-9**: “Why will you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over into the land that the LORD has given them? Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the people of Israel from going into the land that the LORD had given them.”
    - (2) **Deuteronomy 9:23**: “And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God and did not believe or obey his voice.”
    - (3) How sad. God had already won the victory for the first generation of Israelites. He had already given them the land. However, they rebelled and didn’t take possession.

- d) In like manner, God has already won the victory for us. He has already defeated sin, death, and Satan. He has already secured the salvation for us. By Jesus on the cross, in the ground, and resurrected, God has already won the victory.
- (1) **Hebrews 9:11-12:** "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."
  - (2) **Hebrews 9:23-26:** "Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."
  - (3) On the cross, Jesus secured eternal redemption. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He has already won the victory.
3. Israel had to go up and take possession of the land God had secured for them; we must go up and take possession of the salvation God has secured for us.
- a) At this point, I know some are petrified, "Wait! What? Are you saying God has already won the victory so I don't have to do anything?" Interestingly, though the Bible is quite clear that God is the one who wins the victory, the saints in Scripture never took that to mean they had no responsibilities. In fact, quite the opposite. They understood that because God had won the victory, they knew they had responsibilities.
  - b) Consider again **Deuteronomy 9:23**. What had God told that first generation of Israelites? "Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you." God had given them the land. That was the assurance that they could take the land. However, Israel's response was not supposed to be, "We can't take the land on our own so we'll just sit here and do nothing." The response was supposed to be to believe God had given them the land and let that motivate them to go take possession of it.
  - c) In Moses's retelling of the first generation's failure found in **Numbers 32:6-13**, God had given them the land. However, instead of letting that motivate them to take the hold of the land, they did not believe, so they did not obey. Because they did not go take hold of the gift God had already given them, they did not receive it. They did not make use of it. They did not enjoy its blessings. Instead, they wandered in the wilderness until they all died, except Joshua and Caleb who did believe and did obey and did receive the gift God had already won for them.
  - d) In like manner, we must take possession of the redemption, salvation, and victory God has already won for us through Jesus Christ on the cross.
    - (1) **I Timothy 6:12:** "Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."
      - (a) Jesus secured the eternal redemption by His sacrifice on the cross, but we must take hold of the eternal life to which we have been called.
    - (2) **Philippians 2:12-13:** "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."
      - (a) For some reason, some think claiming God is the one working and willing in us means we don't do anything. Not at all. Because God is working and willing in us, what we do is actually effective. If God were not working and willing, we might as well give up. If God had not already secured salvation, it wouldn't matter how many times we got baptized, how often we attended the church's assemblies, how much we studied our Bibles, how often we prayed, how many sins we avoided. However, because God has secured redemption and put away sin, because God has already won the victory, our work actually matters.
  - e) In other words, far from being an incentive to disobey God and pursue sin, God's gracious gift is the only legitimate motivation for actually obeying Him.

- f) Having said that, let us be clear that the battle must be fought with faith in God to win the victory. Otherwise, we are like the Israelites of **Numbers 14:39-45**, working really hard to win the battle but without the grace that actually makes our fighting and work effective.
- (1) For example: **Colossians 2:12** demonstrates that we must be buried with Christ in baptism if we want to take hold of eternal life. However, that action is only effective if accompanied by faith in the powerful working of God. If we think we are being saved by our work in baptism, the work is useless.
4. When Israel had won the victory, they needed to give God the glory for the victory. So do we.
- a) Israel went into the land and fought. They fought hard. Sometimes their fighting was accompanied by miracles, sometimes not. I have no doubt they fought just as hard, perhaps harder than the first generation did at the end of **Numbers 14**. But God wanted to remind them who should get the glory. He wanted to remind them who actually accomplished their victory. It wasn't them. They had not fought their way through the Promised Land. God had fought the battles for them, with them, through them. God was the one who had accomplished this victory. They needed to give Him the glory for it.
- b) In **Joshua 24**, Joshua spoke to the people on God's behalf. He gave them a crash course in family and nation history. Every step of the way he highlighted that God accomplished the promises. God says, "I took your father Abraham...I gave him Isaac...I gave Jacob and Esau...I sent Moses and Aaron...I plagued Egypt...I brought your fathers out of Egypt...brought you to the land of the Amorites...I gave them into your hand..."
- c) Especially note **Joshua 24:12-13**: "And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant." Israel had in fact used their sword and their bow. They had to take up arms and fight. In fact, we have already discovered if they didn't do so, they would not have received the Promised Land. However, the victory was not won by their sword and bow. It was by God and His grace.
- (1) This becomes a theme for Israel.
- (2) **Psalms 44:1-3**: "O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them."
- (3) **Hosea 1:7**: "But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horseman."
- (4) **I Samuel 2:9**: "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail."
- (5) **Psalms 33:16-17**: "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue."
- (6) **Zechariah 4:6**: "Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.'"
- d) Thus, God was to be glorified for these victories. This didn't deny that Israel took possession of the land. This didn't deny that Israel fought the battles. This didn't deny that if Israel had neglected to believe God's promises and neglected to obey God's commands they would not have received the Land. It simply acknowledged whose power accomplished the victory. It merely acknowledged the keeping of a promise and the giving of a gift.
- e) In like manner, when we win victories and when we win the victory, though we took up arms to fight, though we submitted, though we surrendered, though we obeyed, we do not take the glory. The glory goes to God.
- (1) As **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, we cannot boast in ourselves regarding our salvation; we can only boast in the Lord.
- (2) As **Philippians 4:13** explains, I can do all things, but only through Him who strengthens me.
- (3) As **Romans 8:37** shows, we are more than conquerors, but only through Him who loves us.

- (4) As **I Corinthians 6:20** says, we were bought with a price so we must glorify God in our body.
5. If Israel forgot who won the victory, they would lose it. If we forget who won our victory, we will lose it.
- a) Sadly, the account of Israel doesn't end with their victorious conquest. We could read through the historical accounts of Israel's repeated falls. However, let's simply notice one of the many warnings God gave Israel found in **Deuteronomy 8:11-20**.
  - b) God was aware that after Israel went up and took possession of the victory God had already won for them, they would grow puffed up. They would forget God was the one who brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. They would forget God was the one who led them through the wilderness. God was the one who brought them through the serpents and the scorpions. God was the one who provided them food and water. God was the one who brought them into the land. **Deuteronomy 8:20** is quite clear. If/when they forgot God was the one who delivered them, they would be removed from the land. The victory God had won for them would be taken away.
  - c) God speaks of this forgetting in three different ways.
    - (1) **Deuteronomy 8:11**—He warned them against forgetting God by simply not doing what He said, by not obeying His statutes. God had delivered Israel from Egypt so they could worship and serve Him. That is evident by the way He started the 10 commandments in **Exodus 20:1**: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." He did not bring them out so they could do what was right in their own eyes, but what was right in His (cf. **Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25**). Turning from God's will was forgetting the God who bought them.
    - (2) **Deuteronomy 8:19**—He warned them against forgetting God and going after other gods to serve and worship them. This is the most obvious means of forgetting their God. If they turned to Baal, Ashtoreth, Molech or some other God, they were forgetting which deity is real and which one actually brought them into the land. We see God's response to this in **Deuteronomy 32:37-38**. If Israel wants to pursue other gods, the one true God will let them. "Then he will say, 'Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection.'" God calls this to Israel's attention in **Judges 10:14**, saying, "Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress." In **Jeremiah 2:27-28** He reminds Israel of this again: "For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!' But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as may as your cities are your gods, O Judah."
    - (3) **Deuteronomy 8:17**—Perhaps this one shocks us the most. I fear it is the one many of us need to beware. God told Israel, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'" (ESV). If Israel forgot God was the one who won the victory and chalked it up to their own power and might, they would lose the victory God had given them. This ties back to who should get the glory. For all that Israel was involved in the battles that won the land, they must never forget God was really the victor. They were merely His weapons.
  - d) In like manner, we must understand that if we forget who won our victory, we will lose it. Like the unforgiving servant in **Matthew 18:23-35**. If we do not respond properly to the forgiveness and salvation God gives, it will be taken from us. We must take care not to forget God in any of the three ways Israel was warned.
    - (1) In **Ephesians 2:10**, when God said we were saved by grace, He explained that while we aren't saved by our works, we are saved to walk in His good works. God did not deliver us from sin so we might continue to pursue it. No wonder in **Ephesians 4:1** He tells us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. In **Ephesians 4:17** that we must no longer walk like the Gentiles. In **Ephesians 5:2** that we must walk in love like Christ. In **Ephesians 5:8** that we must walk as children of light. And in **Ephesians 5:15ff** that we must walk wisely, making the best use of our time. God won the victory for us so we could and would walk according to His will. If we forget Him by walking our own way and abandoning His, we will lose the victory He has won for us.

- (2) If we turn to other gods, we also have forgotten the God who saved us. Of course, we do not bow before statues. However, do we bow before our pleasures? If we believe money, food, sex, power, fame, alcohol, vengeance will deliver us, providing us escape and refuge, then we have forgotten the God who actually delivers, rescues, and gives refuge. As Jesus explains in **Matthew 6:24**, no one can serve two masters. He doesn't suggest we avoid two masters: "You might not want two masters." He doesn't advise against two masters: "You really shouldn't have two masters." He doesn't warn against two masters: "You must not have two masters." He doesn't even command against two masters: "You shall not have two masters." He simply states a fact: "You cannot have two masters." We must not think we can add another god alongside the one true God. There is no room on that throne for another. If we go after another master, God ceases to be our master and we lose the victory He has won us.
- (3) If we, having taken hold of salvation and having had reasonable success in victory over sin, begin to think we are somehow the masters of our salvation, that we have won this victory by our might and willpower, we will lose the victory God has given us. **Titus 3:3-7** explains we did not win the victory. Certainly, we went up and took possession of the victory God had given, just as Israel did, but it was God through Christ and the Holy Spirit who won the victory. We have not had victory over sin because we are awesome, but because our God is awesome. If we forget that, we may still be attending the assemblies, reading our Bibles, saying our prayers, doing our good deeds, but we are no longer walking in the victory. We will lose it. There will not be nearly so many judgment day surprises for people who are covering up egregious sins as there will be for those who like the Pharisee of Jesus's **Luke 18:9-14** parable trust in themselves that they are righteous. Who say, "Thank you, God," but clearly mean, "Thank me, God." If we trust in our righteousness and think we have won ourselves the victory, we will lose it.
- C. This is the picture of God's grace. We can find it repeated again and again. Noah's victory over the flood. David's victory over Goliath. Israel's victory in so many battles. Joshua and Zerubbabel building the temple. Nehemiah building the wall. Peter walking on the water. The lame healed and the blind receiving sight.
- D. Now we can examine what anyone says about grace, including Calvin and Calvinists, and see how they measure up to the picture of God's grace found in Scripture.

### III. Saving Grace

- A. We're talking about saving grace, not every kind of grace.
  - 1. I recently read, but can't remember where, "Words don't have meanings, they have uses." Similarly, years ago I heard, but again don't remember where, "Words don't mean things, we mean things by words." We use the word "grace" in numerous ways. An Olympic figure skater does so with grace. A talented musician adds in grace notes. Some people grace this conference with their presence. Barbarians lack all good graces. When we are behind on our bills, we hope there is a grace period.
  - 2. Just so not every use of "God's grace" is the same. By God's grace, we live and move and have our very being (cf. **Acts 17:28**). By God's grace, we enjoy the sunshine and rain (cf. **Matthew 5:45**). By God's grace, we have daily sustenance (cf. **I Timothy 4:3-5; Matthew 6:11**). In fact, by God's grace we receive every good and perfect gift (**James 1:17**). But none of this is the same as saying, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (**Ephesians 2:8**).
  - 3. Let's be clear that this lecture does not have to do with everything that could be semantically labeled God's grace. I don't want to get caught in endless circles of semantic arguments. Based on **Acts 17:28**, I can say that I cannot lift my little finger apart from the grace of God. Therefore, I could clearly say that I cannot lift even my little finger to participate in salvation or to receive salvation. However, that is not in reference to the grace this lecture is concerned with. In fact, it would be semantically possible to say, "Only by the grace of God am I able to receive the grace of God." However, that would actually refer to two different manifestations of God's gifts and graces. The first is a part of what I will call common grace, the grace with which God has graced everyone—common abilities, breathing, moving, volition etc. The latter is what I refer to as saving grace.
  - 4. By saving grace, I am referring to the means by which the dead are brought to life, the lost are found, the enslaved are set free, the perishing are rescued, the sinful are made holy, the hopeless are saved. I am not referring to the common grace God gives to all to live, move, and be. I am not referring to the universal abilities with which God has graced His human creation, without which we could do nothing, not even

breathe. Having said that, I am aware that part of this discussion will include whether or not the ability to respond to God's saving grace is part of saving grace or is it part of the common universal grace.

5. By extension of this point, I ask anyone reading or listening who disagrees to please strive to understand my uses of words and what I mean by the words used, not wrangle over the technical definitions of words based on some dictionary entry somewhere.

B. Saving grace delivers from slavery, not heredity.

1. Calvinism agrees with the Bible in this: I need saving grace. In fact, while I believe I can misunderstand my need for saving grace, I don't believe I can overstate my need for it.
2. However, Calvinism is wrong when it teaches I need saving grace to deliver me from inherited depravity.
  - a) "Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh." (Institutes, v I p 217)
  - b) "All of us, therefore, descending from an impure seed, come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin. Nay, before we behold the light of the sun we are in God's sight defiled and polluted." (Institutes, v I p 214)
  - c) "There is nothing absurd, therefore, in the view, that when [Adam] was divested, his nature was left naked and destitute, that he having been defiled by sin, the pollution extends to all his seed." (Institutes, v I p 216)
  - d) "As a result, this resemblance to God having been effaced in us, we all who descend from the seed of Adam are born flesh from flesh. For, though we are composed of a soul and a body, yet we feel nothing but the flesh, so that to whatever part of man we turn our eyes, it is impossible to see anything that is not impure, profane, and abominable to God. The intellect of man is indeed blinded, wrapped with infinite errors and always contrary to the wisdom of God; the will, bad and full of corrupt affections, hates nothing more than God's justice; and the bodily strength, incapable of all good deeds, tends furiously toward iniquity." (Instruction in Faith, p 21)
  - e) "Man did not come from the hands of his Creator in this depraved, corrupt condition. God made Adam upright; there was no evil whatsoever in his nature. Originally, Adam's will was free from the dominion of sin; he was under no natural compulsion to choose evil, but through his fall he brought spiritual death upon himself and all his posterity. He thereby plunged himself and the entire race into spiritual ruin and lost for himself and his descendants the ability to make right choices in the spiritual realm. His descendants are still free to choose—every man makes choices throughout life—but inasmuch as Adam's offspring are born with sinful natures, they do not have the a ABILITY to choose spiritual good over evil. Consequently, man's will is no longer free (i.e. free from the dominion of sin) as Adam's will was free before the fall. Instead, man's will, as the result of inherited depravity, is in bondage to his sinful nature." (Steele and Thomas, p 25)
3. This inherited corrupt nature is an utter ruination. It means that I sin necessarily. It is not merely an inability to live righteously; it is an inability to even want to live righteously. It does not merely claim that unregenerate man sins; it claims unregenerate man only sins and is only able to sin. It is not merely the inability to deliver one's self; it is the inability to even grab hold of the outstretched hand of the one who would deliver.
  - a) "[Augustine teaches] that the human will is indeed free, but only to [will] evil. And this epithet is not applied to it in the true sense, since it is the slave of iniquity. For it is evil by nature and for that reason is held bound and captive under the yoke of sin, until it be freed through Christ. This corruption extends to our being unable not only to will or resolve anything good, but even to conceive the thought of it. Therefore God is not induced by our preparation to bestow his grace on us, but in every way he goes before us, so that the beginning is in his pure mercy. For all human faculties are corrupt, so that of themselves they can bear only evil fruit." (Bondage and Liberation, p 135)
  - b) "We acknowledge man by nature to be blind, darkened in understanding, and full of corruption and perversity of heart, so that of himself he has no power to be able to comprehend the true knowledge of God as is proper, nor to apply himself to good works. But on the contrary, if he is left by God to what he is by nature, he is only able to live in ignorance and to be abandoned to all iniquity. Hence he has need to be illumined by God, so that he come to the right knowledge of his salvation, and thus to be redirected in his affections and reformed to the obedience of the righteousness of God." (Theological

Treatises, "Geneva Confession," p. 27: editor explains that this confession was possibly written by William Farel, but if Calvin did not explicitly write this confession himself, he was involved)

- c) "M[inister]: But are all men's works so despicable and worthless that they are unable to obtain favour [sic] with God?  
"C[hild]: First, whatever works proceed from us as properly to be called our own are vicious; then further, they can do nothing but displease God and be rejected by him.  
"M: You say then that, before we are reborn and remade by the Spirit of God, we are able to do nothing but sin, just as the bad tree produces only bad fruit (Matt. 7:17).  
"C: Precisely so. For whatever appearance they may have in the eyes of men, they are none the less evil so long as the heart, to which God chiefly looks, is depraved." (Theological Treatises, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," pp 105-106)
4. The Bible proclaims we need saving grace every bit as much as Calvin does. However, the Bible proclaims we need it for different reasons than Calvin does. According to the Bible, we neither inherit a corrupt nature from Adam nor did we sin in Adam. According to the Bible, we do not need to be delivered either from a nature we inherited from Adam nor from a sin we committed while in the seed of Adam.
- a) We did not inherit a corrupt nature from Adam.
- (1) Though this concept is so often repeated today it seems like a very natural explanation, it is really based on incorrect science. Aristotle posited in On the Generation of Animals that the male contained the form or the nature of the animal while the female only provided the substance or matter. (McKeon, pp 667-679)
- (a) Augustine would have been familiar with this concept and thus the idea of Total Inherited Depravity or Original Sin would seem natural to him. If the nature or form of man was changed in Adam, he would pass it on in his seed. This is why he was able to believe Jesus did not have this part of the "nature" of man. Jesus wasn't born of the seed of man, but the seed of God. Mary provided the substance or matter, but God provided the form or nature.
- (b) Thus, this incorrect science found its way into supposed "Christian doctrine" in Augustine, was adopted without consideration by the Reformers, and has been passed on to us today.
- (2) I challenge that this is the way the "nature" of man's spirit works. While the body of man was created from the dust and the matter of the ongoing generations continue through natural means, the soul is the specific creation of God. Souls do not give birth to souls. Spirits do not give birth to spirits. Rather, as **Ecclesiastes 12:7** explains the spirit comes directly from God. Thus, the part of me that makes choices and governs living is not the product of inherited ancestry. It is a gift from God Himself. It is by nature what God created it to be.
- (3) **Ezekiel 18:20** says, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." In other words, Cain and Abel did not suffer a corrupted nature because of Adam's sin and neither do we.
- (4) **Ecclesiastes 7:29** says, "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." In other words, though God makes us upright, we seek out sins. God did not merely make Adam upright, He makes all of us upright.
- b) We did not sin while being in the seed of Adam.
- (1) This mistakes the point of **Hebrews 7:9**. The Hebrew writer was not trying to assert that everyone has committed the actions of all their ancestors because they were in the seed of those ancestors. He was making a rhetorical argument. By saying, "In a manner of speaking," he demonstrated that he knew this wasn't an absolute truth that applied to every action for every person. Rather, it was a rhetorical device by which he could make a point in his context.
- (2) However, to be more sure, consider **Romans 9:11**. When Paul speaks of Jacob and Esau, he says, "...though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad." If we have all committed sin in Adam because we were in his seed, then Paul could not say Jacob and Esau had not done anything either good or bad. Rather, they had both done all the good and bad works of their ancestors before them because they were in their seed when those acts were performed.
5. While we do not need saving grace to free us from a hereditary corruption, we do need saving grace because we are held captive by the devil to do his will, because we are enslaved by sin.

- a) “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (**II Timothy 2:25-26**).
  - b) “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that swells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death” (**Romans 7:14-24**).
  - c) However, the above did not happen by heredity. **Romans 6:16** says, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.”
  - d) Because we submitted ourselves to sin, we became slaves to sin. And what a harsh taskmaster sin. As the old preachers said, “Sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.” Like any slave, we may hate our master, desire freedom from our master, foment rebellion against our master, try to defeat our master, seek to sneak away from our master, but we cannot break the chains that bind us to the master we so willingly submitted to. We cannot deliver ourselves from sin and Satan. We need saving grace.
  - e) Further when we are delivered from our master of sin and Satan, we must be as Israel in the Promised Land (cf. **Joshua 24:12**). That is, though we showed up for the fight, we recognize it was not by our sword or bow that we won the victory, but by God’s saving grace.
6. Before leaving this point, we need to examine one of Calvinism’s main arguments: that saving grace does not merely deliver us from bondage and slavery, but death (**Ephesians 2:1**). To the Calvinist, dead means unable to do anything, not even open our hand to receive the gift of saving grace.
- a) “For he cries that it is his work that we who were blind are enlightened, that we are brought over from darkness into his light, that we are renewed in mind, that finally we are roused from death to life. What kind of preparation will one who is dead use to call for the grace of God?” (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 174)
  - b) However, this takes the metaphor too far. Paul does not intend to claim we have no ability to do anything good. Rather, he borrows from the imagery with which God commanded Adam to obey lest he die. This spiritual death, or separation from God (consider **Isaiah 59:1-2**), forewarns the eternal death and damnation we will experience.
  - c) But even Calvin is aware that the metaphor of death doesn’t mean we are completely incapable of performing discrete acts of the thing to which we are dead.
    - (1) As Calvin tries to explain the meaning of **Romans 7:14-24**, attributing it to Paul in a regenerated state, he makes some interesting claims about death.
    - (2) “So then he bemoans the common bondage of the faithful in [speaking of] his own person. For while he wills and desires the good, he does not find the ability to accomplish it. With his mind he agrees with the law of God, but in his flesh with the law of sin, and so he does not do the good which he loves, but rather the evil which he hates. You see his will agreeing with righteousness. Where then does the obstacle come from, which prevents the action from following? Surely only from a contrary desire. Where, next, does that desire come from, if not from the fact that remnants of the old man which struggle against the Spirit live on in him? For he had said in the sixth chapter that the old man had died through the cross of Christ, but afterwards he adds that it is not dead in such a way as to cease causing a troublesome struggle.” (*Bondage and Liberation*, pp 179-180)
  - d) What is good for the goose is good for the gander. Calvin cannot make much ado out of death in **Ephesians 2:1-3**, but flippantly cast it aside in **Romans 6-7**. If the old man died, but can still have influence to perform discrete acts of wickedness in the regenerate, then though I am dead in sin, I can still have

the ability to perform discrete acts of obedience. That is, though unregenerate man is dead in sin to righteousness, he “is not dead in such a way as to cease causing a troublesome struggle.”

C. Saving grace is unmerited, not unconditional.

1. Calvinism agrees with the Bible in this: we cannot earn or merit saving grace. Having earned the wages of death, I cannot earn a wage of life, but can only have life through the free gift of God.
  - a) “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 6:23**).
  - b) Consider the following illustrations.
    - (1) The Prodigal Son returned home seeking to be a servant, striving to earn his keep in his father’s house. But the father graciously reinstated sonship (**Luke 15:18-24**).
    - (2) The Unforgiving Servant fell down before the king and begged for patience that he might earn his way out of his tremendous debt. But the king graciously offered him forgiveness (**Matthew 18:26-27**).
2. Calvinism also agrees with the Bible in this: I will not be saved because I am perfect, because I begin to live perfectly, or because I am good enough and God saw some deserving or worthy thing in me.
  - a) “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (**Titus 3:3-7**).
3. However, Calvinism while positing that we cannot merit or deserve or earn salvation, also posits there are no conditions upon saving grace. It essentially equates the concept of condition with merit.
  - a) “Many controvert all the positions which we have laid down, especially the gratuitous election of believers, which however cannot be overthrown. For they commonly imagine that God distinguishes between men according to the merits which he foresees that each individual is to have, giving the adoption of sons to those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace, and dooming those to destruction whose dispositions he perceives will be prone to mischief and wickedness. Thus by interposing foreknowledge as a veil, they not only obscure election, but pretend to give it a different origin.” (Institutes, v II p 212)
  - b) “God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual who He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God’s choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected he brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God’s choice of the sinner, not the sinner’s choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.” (Steele and Thomas, pp 16-17)
4. By this, Calvinism does not mean that the elect will be saved without faith, repentance, and good works. Rather, in true Calvinism, it means faith, repentance, and all good works are gifts of saving grace. In Calvinism, the believing, penitent, and working do not receive saving grace, rather those receiving saving grace will believe, repent, and work.
  - a) "M[inister]: Do we conceive faith of ourselves or do we receive it from God?  
"C[hild]: Scripture teaches that it is a special gift of God, and experience confirms this.  
"M: Tell me what experience you mean.  
"C: Our mind is too rude to be able to grasp the spiritual wisdom of God which is revealed to us through faith; and our hearts are too prone to distrust or to perverse confidence in ourselves or other creatures to rest of their own accord in God. But the Holy Spirit by his illumination makes us capable of understanding those things which would otherwise far exceed our grasp, and brings us to a sure persuasion by sealing the promises of salvation in our hearts.” (Theological Treatises, “Catechism of the Geneva Church,” p 105)
  - b) “Those who are born again think differently from those who are not, precisely because they have been regenerated; regenerated people will begin to live out the superior moral life of Christ. No one

believes on Christ who has not been given a new nature, and although that new nature does not show itself completely all at once, if we are justified, we have it and it will increasingly and inevitably express itself in forgiveness of and service to others, just as God has forgiven and done good to us. We are not justified by works. But if we do not do good works, we are not justified. We are not Christians.” (Boice, Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace, p 119).

5. Further, Calvinism by this does not claim sinning is okay or that it doesn't matter. Neither does Calvinism claim the elect do not have to obey God.
  - a) “But to return, Sire. Be not moved by the absurd insinuations with which our adversaries are striving to frighten you into the belief that nothing else is wished and aimed at by this new gospel (for so they term it), than opportunity for sedition and impunity for all kinds of vice. Our God is not the author of division, but of peace; and the Son of God, who came to destroy the works of the devil, is not the minister of sin...It is plain, indeed, that we fear God sincerely, and worship him in truth, since, whether by life or by death, we desire his name to be hallowed...But if any, under pretext of the gospel, excite tumults (none such have as yet been detected in your realm), if any use the liberty of the grace of God as a cloak for licentiousness (I know of numbers who do), there are laws and legal punishments by which they may be punished up to the measure of their deserts—only, in the mean time, let not the gospel of God be evil spoken of because of the iniquities of evil men.” (Institutes, v I p 19)
  - b) "3. The Law of God Alike For All  
"Because there is one only Lord and Master who has dominion over our consciences, and because his will is the only principle of all justice, we confess all our life ought to be ruled in accordance with the commandments of his holy law in which is contained all perfection of justice, and that we ought to have no other rule of good and just living, nor invent other good works to supplement it than whose [sic] are there contained, as follows: Exodus 20: 'I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee,' and so on." (Theological Treatises, "The Geneva Confession," p 26-27)
  - c) "19. Excommunication  
"Because there are always some who hold God and his Word in contempt, who take account of neither injunction, exhortation nor remonstrance, thus requiring greater chastisement, we hold the discipline of excommunication to be a thing holy and salutary among the faithful, since truly it was instituted by the Lord with good reason. This is in order that the wicked should not by their damnable conduct corrupt the good and dishonour [sic] our Lord, and that though proud they may turn to penitence. Therefore we believe that it is expedient according to the ordinance of God that all manifest idolaters, blasphemers, murderers, thieves, lewd persons, false witnesses, sedition-mongers, quarrellers [sic], those guilty of defamation or assault, drunkards, dissolute livers, when they have been duly admonished and if they do not make amendment, be separated from communion of the faithful until their repentance is known." (Theological Treatises, "The Geneva Confession," p 31-32)
6. Neither does Calvinism teach that men and women should simply wait around for God to force them to follow and obey Him.
  - a) "But I do not merely send men off to the secret election of God to await with gaping mouth salvation there. I bid them make their way directly to Christ in whom salvation is offered us, which otherwise would have lain hid in God. For whoever does not walk in the plain path of faith can make nothing of the election of God but a labyrinth of destruction." (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 113)
7. However, a condition for receiving saving grace is simply not the same as earning or meriting saving grace. God does not grant saving grace to people because He sees or foresees some worth or merit. However, He does see (in fact foresees) the meeting of conditions. Namely the condition of being in Christ.
  - a) Paul makes the basis of God's election abundantly clear in **Ephesians 1:3-14**.
    - (1) "...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Paul does not say He chose us to be in Him before the foundation of the world. Rather, he says God chose "us in him" to be holy and blameless. What is God's election based on? Seeing and knowing those who are in Christ. He elected these to be holy and blameless.

- (2) "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ..." Again, based on the earlier verse, this "us" is the "us in him." He did not predestine us to be in Christ. But He did predestine those of us who are in Christ to be adopted as sons through Christ in whom we live and dwell.
- (3) "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." We who are in Him are predestined to have an inheritance which is to the praise of His glory.
- b) Far from demonstrating an unconditional election, **Ephesians 1:3-14** teaches a conditional election. We are chosen, elected, and predestined to be holy, blameless, adopted, heirs, and to the praise of His glory. But the basis for this election is not secret or hidden. Rather it is based on being in Christ.
- (1) To be sure, we enter Christ through faithful repentance unto baptism (cf. **Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 3:23-29**).
8. The Calvinistic term for this saving grace as "Unconditional Election" is "prevenient grace."
- a) "Augustine says that he does not condemn 'those good works done by free choice after it has been prepared by prevenient grace apart from any merit of free choice. Grace itself does them, guides them, and completes them.' So [Pighius] like a victor taunts me and criticises [sic] both my foolishness and my obstinacy, saying that I have no discernment. Shall I not say that he is a madman who aims straight at his own throat when he thinks he is striking his foe? Let us leave on one side the expression 'free choice' itself, about which dispute would be otiose. Those works which Augustine declares to be good and worthy of praise are precisely those which the Spirit of God prepares to be done, and this happens by the prevenience of grace without any merit of the will. If our will is preceded by the grace of God, without any merit of its own, where is that good motion and preparation which Pighius fabricates? If the same grace effects, guides, and finishes whatever good works there are in us, why are we still in dispute?" (Bondage and Liberation, pp 115-116)
- b) "Prevenient grace" then refers to saving grace offered before or antecedent to any action on man's part. Not only that, in a sense, before any knowledge from God about man's action. Saving grace precedes and is the cause of man believing and accepting saving grace. By definition, this kind of grace must be unconditional.
- c) On the surface, such prevenience seems to be justified by Paul's declaration that election happens before the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). How can Paul claim this election is before the foundation of the world, but also state it is based on a condition met by man being in Christ?
- (1) Paul says it was through foreknowledge in **Romans 7:29-30**: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."
- (2) Certainly, Calvin repeatedly denies God's predestination is based on His foreknowledge, claiming it is, in fact, the other way around.
- (a) "I, for my part, am willing to admit, that mere prescience lays no necessity on the creatures...If God merely foresaw human events, and did not also arrange and dispose of them at his pleasure, there might be room for agitating the question, how far his foreknowledge amounts to necessity; but since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment." (Institutes, v II p 231)
- (3) However, despite Calvin's cavils, Paul clearly states God's predestination is based on His foreknowledge
9. What I am positing in this point is simply anathema to Calvinism. The doctrine simply cannot imagine the concept of condition without attaching to it the concept of claiming one person is worthy of salvation and the other is not. However, when we recognize that in essence the condition is the recognition that we are completely unworthy of salvation and therefore throwing ourselves on the mercy of Christ, we can see that meeting a condition is not the same as becoming worthy.
- a) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 5:3**).
- b) "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (**Luke 18:13**).

10. Finally, we need to address the concept of boasting. Calvinism cannot consent to a condition without claiming that a person would be able to boast about having met the condition.
- a) "If we destroy the righteousness of God by establishing our own righteousness, then, in order to obtain his righteousness, our own must be entirely abandoned. This also he shows, when he declares that boasting is not excluded by the law, but by faith (Rom. iii. 27). Hence it follows, that so long as the minutest portion of our own righteousness remains, we have still some ground for boasting. Now if faith utterly excludes boasting, the righteousness of works cannot in any way be associated with the righteousness of faith." (*Institutes*, v II p 51)
  - b) We must recognize the difference from a boast and an assertion. The Bible does clearly teach there is no room for boasting in saving grace, save in boasting in the Lord (cf. **Ephesians 2:9; I Corinthians 1:31**). However, Calvinism defines the use of "boast" here in a vacuum instead of allowing the Bible to define what this boasting is about which it is concerned.
  - c) Gideon and his 300 soldiers help us understand what kind of boasting the above passages are talking about.
    - (1) In **Judges 7**, the Midianites had been oppressing Israel. God had called Gideon to deliver Israel. In **Judges 7:2**, God said, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"
      - (2) As we said about "grace" earlier, we can say about "boast" now. We can use that word in many ways. But how is God using it? He is not using it to describe making an assertion about an action. After all, Gideon and his 300 could assert that they showed up for the fight. No doubt, if they had not shown up for the fight, they would not have had victory over the Midianites. They could assert that they obeyed God when they blew the trumpets, broke the jars, and shouted. However, when the victory was won, they could not boast over God that they had saved themselves.
      - (3) Additionally, this concept of boasting has nothing to do with being able to assert that the regenerate did something to receive and accept saving grace while the unregenerate did not. God's concern is not about assertions and claims between men, it is about men boasting over God that they saved themselves.
      - (4) For instance, the second generation of Israelites coming to the edge of the Promised Land could assert that they believed God, obeyed God, and took possession of the Land, while the first generation could not make that claim. That being said, the second generation could patently not boast that they won themselves the victory (cf. **Deuteronomy 8:17-18**).
      - (5) Thus, an assertion that we believed, we repented, we were baptized casting ourselves on the mercy and grace of the Lord is not boasting over God that we have saved ourselves. They are actually a claim that God saved us.
- D. Saving grace is for all, not merely for some.
1. Calvinism agrees with the Bible in this: saving grace is not applied to all, but only to the elect.
    - a) "This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed" (**II Thessalonians 2:5-10**).
    - b) "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (**John 5:28-29**).
  2. However, Calvinism is not satisfied claiming saving grace is only applied to the elect. It maintains it is only truly offered to those God predestined to election and no one else.
    - a) "But since conversion is his peculiar gift, he converts in fact those whom he effectually wills to be converted. In what sense Paul teaches that God wishes all to be saved, readers may learn from the context itself. The mode of salvation is that they come to a knowledge of the truth; but he does not

- please that by his external Word all should come; and he makes only a few partakers of his hidden illumination." (Theological Treatises, "A Brief Reply in Refutation of the Calumnies of a Certain Worthless Person," p 342)
- b) "But meanwhile God's secret plan, by which he passes over one and chooses another, remains his own, and one should not inquire too curiously into it if one does not want to be overwhelmed by [God's] glory. If Pighius grasped this, he would not hold so tenaciously to that false axiom about the equal distribution of grace. For after he has finished his speech, he finally descends to this conclusion, namely to assert with the Pelagians that 'God's grace is given to us according to our merit, so that he may be with us; indeed our merit lies in this: that we are with God' (Augustine *Grace and Free Choice* 5). Our whole position, on the other hand, comes back to this statement of Augustine: 'Those to whom it is not given either do not will, or they do not fulfill what they will; but those to whom it is given will in such a way that they do fulfill it' (ibid., ch. 4)." (Bondage and Liberation, p 199)
  - c) "For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever." (Canons of Dort, "The Second Head of Doctrine," Article 8)
  - d) "Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation." (Steele and Thomas, p. 17)
  - e) "Christ did not die simply to make it possible for God to pardon sinners. Neither does God leave it up to sinners as to whether or not Christ's work will be effective. On the contrary, all for whom Christ sacrificed Himself will be saved infallibly. Redemption, therefore, was designed to bring to pass God's purpose of election." (Steele and Thomas, p 39)
  - f) "Calvinists believe that Jesus died for the elect alone and that has important implications for how we are to understand the nature, character, and effect of Christ's death, as well as for how we understand its extent." (Boice, The Doctrines of Grace, p 113)
  - g) "There are two questions that must be answered by anyone who would begin to seriously discuss the biblical doctrine of the atonement: What did the triune God *intend* to do at the very focal point of history, the cross of Calvary, and what was *accomplished* in that sacrifice? For some, *intention* and *accomplishment* are not necessarily the same. The Reformed answer to both questions is plain and clear: God the Father decreed the salvation of an elect people, Christ died with the intention of redeeming those people through their union with Him and accomplished that task, and without fail the Holy Spirit brings that accomplished work to fruition in the life of the elect at the time and in the manner determined by God." (Hunt and White, p 170)
3. To be clear, Calvinism agrees with the Bible that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross had the power to give saving grace to all people. Nothing more had to be done to give saving grace to more people than it does.
    - a) "All Calvinists agree that Christ's obedience and suffering were of infinite value, and that if God had so willed, the satisfaction rendered by Christ would have saved every member of the human race. It would have required no more obedience, nor any greater suffering for Christ to have secured the salvation for every man, woman, and child who ever lived than it did for Him to secure salvation for the elect only." (Steele and Thomas, p 39)
  4. However, Calvinism asserts that despite having that power, God intentionally chose before the foundation of the world to not give or truly offer saving grace to some. Therefore, Jesus did not in any way die for all, but only died for those whom God chose out of the world to save.

5. Why?
    - a) "If you ask the reason why God corrects the vice in His elect but deems the reprobate unworthy of the same remedy, it is hidden in Himself." (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 116)
    - b) "But meanwhile God's secret plan, by which he passes over one and chooses another, remains his own, and one should not inquire too curiously into it if one does not want to be overwhelmed by [God's] glory." (Bondage and Liberation, p 199)
    - c) "Now, why does the Lord use his mercy toward some and exercise the rigor of his judgment on the others? We have to leave the reason of this to be known to him alone. For, he, with a certainly excellent intention, has willed to keep it hidden from us all." (Instruction in Faith, p 36)
  6. The Bible teaches saving grace is for all. God wants all to be saved and wants no one to perish.
    - a) "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" (**I Timothy 2:3-6**).
    - b) "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (**II Peter 2:9**).
    - c) "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (**I John 2:2**).
    - d) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**).
  7. Of course, Calvinists are aware of these passages. Multiple arguments are made to bring these passages in line with Limited Atonement/Particular Redemption.
    - a) Surely God always gets what He wants. Therefore, these verses must apply only to "all" of the elect or the "world" of the elect.
    - b) These passages refer to the elect in the whole world.
    - c) These passages refer to every class or every nationality or every race. That is, some from all classes, nationalities, and races will be saved.
  8. Calvinism's misunderstanding.
    - a) "When we put these terms together [redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, atonement], looking at their precise meanings, we see that Jesus did not come merely to make salvation possible, but actually to save his people. He did not come to make redemption possible; he died to redeem his people. He did [not] come to make propitiation possible; he turned aside God's wrath for each of his elect people forever. He did not come to make reconciliation between God and man possible; he actually reconciled to God those whom the Father had given him. He did not come merely to make atonement for sins possible, but actually to atone for sins." (Boice, The Doctrines of Grace, p 122)
    - b) In this way, Boice begs the question. Of course Christ on the cross actually saves and redeems Christ's people. Of course Christ on the cross makes propitiation for and atones for God's elect. Of course Christ on the cross actually reconciles those in Christ. But what about those claims means God was not offering that same saving grace to others?
    - c) "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (**Hebrews 9:12**). Jesus paid the price for eternal redemption. He secured it. However, just as God had already given Israel the land, but they had to go take possession of it, God has secured the eternal redemption for all but we must take hold of that eternal life (**I Timothy 6:12**). Those who do not take hold of it, do not enjoy the benefits of what was purchased for them by God.
  9. Thus, in contrast to Calvinism, the Bible teaches God's saving grace was purchased for all by Jesus on the cross, but only benefits those who take hold of it.
- E. Saving grace is motivational and effective, not irresistible.
1. Calvinism agrees with the Bible in this: we are renewed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit not by our own effort. This saving grace is powerful and effective in renewing and regenerating us. Further, only God can renew and regenerate us, we cannot do that ourselves.
    - a) "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the

- goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, who he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (**Titus 3:3-7**).
- b) “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin’?” (**Proverbs 20:9**).
  - c) “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (**Psalms 51:10**).
2. Calvinism also agrees with the Bible in this: the saving grace of God motivates submission to God, love of God, and obedience to God’s commands, and not the other way around.
    - a) “We love because he first loved us” (**I John 4:19**).
    - b) “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (**Romans 5:6-10**).
  3. Oddly, many Christians seem to think if you teach too much about God’s saving grace, you will motivate disobedience. This is simply not true. When folks truly understand and accept the saving grace of God, it is the greatest motivator to obedience. In fact, in Scripture, accepting God’s saving grace never led anyone to sit down and quit working for the Lord. Rather, God’s saving grace motivated them to obey and effectively grew them in Christ.
    - a) “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (**Philippians 2:12-13**).
    - b) Many Christians think believing God is working in us both to will and to work for our good pleasure would mean we decide to quit working. That was not Paul’s idea. He said we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God was at work within us.
    - c) Paul demonstrates that far from motivating us to rest on our laurels, God’s saving grace motivates us too work out our salvation. Because God is at work within us, what we do is worthwhile. If God were not working in us, what we do would be useless. Remember the first generation of Israelites at the end of **Numbers 14**. Their fighting at the Promised Land was useless because God was not fighting through them, in them, or for them. On the other hand, the fighting of that second generation was worthwhile because God was working for, in, and through them.
  4. However, Calvinism does not merely say God’s saving grace is powerful, motivational, and effective. It takes all that to mean it is also irresistible. In fact, this tenet is called “Irresistible Grace.”
    - a) “Therefore, this inward calling is an infallible pledge of salvation.” (Institutes, p 242)
    - b) “This movement of the will is not of that description which was for many ages taught and believed—viz. a movement which thereafter leaves us the choice to obey or resist it—but one which affects us efficaciously. We must therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, ‘Whom he draws, he draws willingly;’ insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid...And the only meaning which can be given to our Saviour’s words, ‘Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me’ (John vi. 45), is, that the grace of God is effectual in itself.” (Institutes, v1 p 260)
    - c) “When He wills to save, the free will of no man can resist Him. Hence there can be no doubt that human wills are unable to resist the will of God who did what He willed in heaven and earth and has done even things future, or prevent Him doing what He wills, seeing that He does with the wills of men themselves what He wishes. Again, when He wishes to bring men, does He bind them with physical chains? He works inwardly, takes hold of their hearts inwardly, moves their hearts inwardly, draws them by the wills which He has wrought in them.” (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 138)
    - d) “In addition, this grace is not of such a kind as to bestow on [its recipients] the power to act well on condition that they will to, so that they thereafter have the option of willing or not willing. But it effectively moves them to will it; indeed it makes their evil will good, so that they of necessity will well. In addition, this does not happen once, so that people are subsequently left to themselves, but

- they are steered on a steady course, so that their perseverance in goodness is no less the gift of God than their beginning it." (Bondage and Liberation, p 136)
- e) "I consider that God does not merely give man the option, so that he has the ability both to will and to act well if it pleases him. But [God] effectively arouses [man's] heart, so that he wills, and [God] so guides it in its entirety that it does and completes by the action what has been granted to it to will." (Bondage and Liberation, p 137)
- f) "There follows the third point, on the effective operation of grace. [In the Institutes] I say, then, that grace is not offered to us in such a way that afterwards we have the option either to submit or to resist. I say that it is not given merely to aid our weakness by its support as though anything depended on us apart from it. But I demonstrate that it is entirely the work of grace and a benefit conferred by it that our heart is changed from a stony one to one of flesh, that our will is made new, and that we, created anew in heart and mind, at length will what we ought to will. For Paul bears witness that God does not bring about in us [merely] that we are able to will what is good, but also that we should will it right up to the completion of the act. How big a difference there is between performance and will! Likewise I determine that our will is effectively formed so that it necessarily follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not that it is sufficiently encouraged to be able to so if it wills." (Bondage and Liberation, p 174)
- g) "...so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received. (The Canons of Dort, "The Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine," Article 12)
- h) "In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended." (Steele and Thomas, p 18)
- i) "...but the special call of the Spirit cannot be rejected; it always results in the conversion of those to whom it is made." (Steele and Thomas, p 54)
5. To be clear, when Calvin and the above Calvinists say God's saving grace is "effective" or "effectual," they are using those words in a different way than I do. They mean by it that God's saving grace cannot be resisted. I mean by it simply that God's saving grace effectively impacts those who accept and submit to it. I mean by it that it is God's saving grace that effects our growth and regeneration.
6. The Bible claims we can resist the saving grace of God through His Holy Spirit.
- a) "Do not quench the Spirit." (**I Thessalonians 5:19**). What use is this imperative if it is impossible to quench or even resist the Spirit?
- b) "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 7:51**).
- c) "And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God" (**Acts 13:43**). What use is this exhortation if grace is irresistible?
- d) "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (**II Corinthians 6:1**). How can it be possible to receive God's grace in vain if it is irresistible?
7. But doesn't God always get what He wants? Surely man is not more powerful than God? If He wants to save people and He wants none to perish, surely those things must happen.
- a) I will let Calvin answer this question.
- (1) "M[inister]: In what sense do you accord him the attribute almighty?  
"C[hild]: That not only he has might he does not exercise..." (Theological Treatises, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," p 93)

- (2) To be fair, the above quote actually goes on to say that God exercises His power in such a way to constitute all things by His will.
  - (3) However, I ask if God is still sovereign and almighty when He chooses not to exercise some aspect of His power, isn't He still sovereign and almighty even when He chooses not to make something happen that He wants to happen?
  - b) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (**Matthew 23:37**). Can we deny that Christ Himself says there was something He wanted, but because Jerusalem was unwilling, it didn't happen?
8. But Calvinism teaches that God doesn't coerce anyone either to sin or to obey God, but all people behave willingly.
- a) "When He wills to save, the free will of no man can resist Him. Hence there can be no doubt that human wills are unable to resist the will of God who did what He willed in heaven and earth and has done even things future, or prevent Him doing what He wills, seeing that He does with the wills of men themselves what He wishes. Again, when He wishes to bring men, does He bind them with physical chains? He works inwardly, takes hold of their hearts inwardly, moves their hearts inwardly, draws them by the wills which He has wrought in them." (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 138)
  - b) "But [Pighius says] Augustine denies that grace is sufficient without free choice, as well as that free choice is sufficient without grace. I agree, but all that he means is that God is working in a human being, and not in a stone, since he has a will, born and prepared for willing, as they say. By bending it to the good, [God] makes good the will which by the corruption of nature is wicked and perverted. So it is just as if he said that a human being cannot will well unless he already has a will, and it is self-determined. Since he has the latter from nature and the former from grace, Augustine rightly says that without free choice there is no room for grace. For what the term 'free choice' means for him has already been seen. If you want this explained to you more clearly, think of it like this: the human will is like matter which has been subjected to the working of grace, so that it may receive its form from it. So it follows that the will with its self-determined movement comes from nature, wickedness from the corruption of nature, [while] goodness results from the grace of the Holy Spirit and so is his own work." (Bondage and Liberation, p 115)
  - c) However, this is a distinction without a difference. One might as well say a computer program performs its tasks willingly, voluntarily, and without coercion. The person may not be forced or coerced to perform a certain action, but he is coerced to want to perform the action and can't do anything other than what he wants.
9. The Bible demonstrates that despite what God wants, He gives man what we ask for.
- a) What a great illustration the first generation of Israelites in the exodus from Egypt provides. Consider the cause of their Wilderness Wanderings.
    - (1) In Section II of this outline, we demonstrated that God had already given the Promised Land to this generation of Jews. They simply needed to go take possession of it. He wanted them in the land.
    - (2) However, when they got to the entrance to the land, 10 of the spies melted their hearts. They refused to go in because they did not believe the promises of God.
    - (3) Despite what God wanted for them, He said, "As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness..." (**Numbers 14:28-29**).
    - (4) What did He mean, "What you have said in my hearing I will do to you" other than He was giving them not what He wanted but what they asked for in **Numbers 14:2** when they said "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!"
10. God's saving grace is the only thing effective for renewing and regenerating us. Further, His saving grace and love are the greatest motivation for us. However, the Bible teaches God's saving grace is not irresistibly or overwhelmingly applied to us. We cannot renew and regenerate ourselves, but we can reject God's promise of renewal and regeneration.

F. Saving grace is empowering, not inescapable.

1. Calvinism agrees with the Bible in this: God's saving grace does in fact empower us to persevere in Christ. The saving grace of Jesus is not applied merely to bring us into Christ, but also is to be relied upon to grow in Christ and overcome sin. In fact, apart from God's saving grace, we will in no wise be able to persevere.
  - a) "...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..." (**Ephesians 3:16, 20**).
  - b) "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (**Hebrews 2:18**).
  - c) "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (**Hebrews 4:15-16**).
  - d) "By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (**I Peter 5:12**).
  - e) "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (**Philippians 4:13**).
  - f) "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (**Romans 8:37**).
  - g) "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (**II Corinthians 12:9**).
2. Calvinism also agrees with the Bible in this: We must put our trust in God's promises, strength, and righteousness and not in our ability to live faithfully until death.
  - a) "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, 'So shall your offspring be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (**Romans 4:18-21**).
  - b) "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (**Romans 8:11**).
  - c) "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (**Romans 8:29-30**).
  - d) "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice" (**Ezekiel 34:15-16**).
3. Calvinism also agrees with the Bible in this: God, in some ways, commands things of us we cannot do in order to drive us to Him and His grace in order to accomplish them. This demonstrates the empowering nature of God's saving grace.
  - a) I have said in the past and I hear it said often that if God commands something of us, that obviously means we can do it. However, the Bible demonstrates a different point regarding at least some of God's commands and Calvin sees this with partial accuracy.
  - b) Consider Calvin's explanations
    - (1) "To this effect are the pithy sayings of Augustine, 'God orders what we cannot do, that we may know what we ought to ask of him. There is a great utility in precepts, if all that is given to free will is to do greater honor to divine grace. Faith acquires what the law requires; nay, the law requires, in order that faith may acquire what is thus required; nay, more, God demands of us faith itself, and finds not what he thus demands, until by giving he makes it possible to find it.' Again, he says, 'Let God give what he orders, and order what he wills.'" (*Institutes*, v I, p 279)
    - (2) "On the other hand, as he desires by all means to stir up believers to supplicate his grace, it surely should not seem strange that he attempts to accomplish by promises the same thing which, as we have shown, he to their great benefit accomplishes by means of precepts. Being taught by

precepts what the will of God is, we are reminded of our wretchedness in being so completely at variance with that will, and, at the same time, are stimulated to invoke the aid of the Spirit to guide us into the right path. But as our indolence is not sufficiently aroused by precepts, promises are added, that they may attract us by their sweetness, and produce a feeling of love for the precept. The greater our desire for righteousness, the greater will be our earnestness to obtain the grace of God.” (*Institutes*, v I, p 282)

- c) Certainly, Calvin is wrong by not admitting God has granted a common grace that allows every individual to perform discrete acts of obedience and righteousness, through which men take hold of the saving grace and eternal life God offers. Further, as stated earlier in this outline, Calvin is incorrect regarding the reason for the incapacity described in these statements. Any inability we have is by voluntary submission to sin as slaves and not by heredity. That being said, Calvin is right that God does at times command of us what we cannot accomplish.
  - d) Biblical illustrations:
    - (1) When God commanded Moses to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, He commanded Moses to do what he could not in order to drive him to rely on God’s power (**Exodus 3:10**)
    - (2) When God commanded Israel to take possession of the Promised Land, He commanded them to do what they could not in order to drive them to rely on God’s grace (**Deuteronomy 9:23**, et al).
    - (3) When God commanded Gideon to deliver Israel from Midian, He commanded Gideon to do what he could not in order to drive him to rely on God’s grace (**Judges 7**).
    - (4) When God commanded Joshua and Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, He commanded them to do what they could not in order to drive them to rely on God’s grace and Spirit (**Zechariah 4:6**).
    - (5) When Jesus commanded Peter to walk on the water, He commanded Peter to do what he could not in order to drive him to rely on Jesus’s grace, power, and strength (**Matthew 14:28-33**).
    - (6) When Peter commanded the lame man to walk, he commanded the lame man to do what he could not in order to drive him to rely on the name and grace of Jesus Christ (**Acts 3:6-7**).
    - (7) When God commands us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, He commands us to do what we cannot in order to drive us to His mercy, grace, strength, and power (**Ephesians 3:14-4:1**).
  - e) Thus, we must understand that God’s saving grace is empowering. It does strengthen us to do what we cannot do on our own. As Paul in **Romans 7** demonstrates that he could not deliver himself from his body of death and live a new life by his own power, strength, and might, but that he could give thanks to God through Jesus Christ who would, by His Spirit, give life to that mortal body.
4. Be aware, Calvinism does not teach once you are saved it doesn’t matter how you live. Calvinism does not teach you will go to heaven no matter what. Thus motivating Christians to abandon God’s law.
- a) No doubt, some people adopt the language of “Perseverance of the Saints,” “Eternal Security,” and “Once Saved, Always Saved,” to make such claims.
    - (1) For instance, Charles Stanley in his book Eternal Security:
 

“Faith is simply the way we say yes to God’s free gift of eternal life. Faith and salvation are not one and the same anymore [sic] than a gift and the hand that receives it are the same. Salvation or justification or adoption—whatever you wish to call it—stand independently of faith. Consequently, God does not require a *constant attitude* of faith in order to be saved—only an *act* of faith.

“One more illustration may be helpful. If I chose to have a tattoo put on my arm, that would involve a one-time act on my part. Yet the tattoo would remain with me indefinitely. I don’t have to maintain an attitude of fondness for tattoos to ensure that the tattoo remains on my arm. In fact I may change my mind the minute I receive it. But that does not change the fact that I have a tattoo on my arm. My request for the tattoo and the tattoo itself are two entirely different things. I received it by asking and paying for it. But asking for my money back and changing my attitude will not undo what is done.

“Forgiveness/salvation is applied at the moment of faith. It is not the same thing as faith. And its permanence is not contingent upon the permanence of one’s faith.” (Stanley, p 80)
    - (2) Because we have a tendency to look at anyone who accepts any one of the points of TULIP as a Calvinist, we might call these folks Calvinists. However, they are not. Or at least Calvin would not accept their teaching as truth.

- (3) In fact, the above would actually be considered a form of Arminianism by the true Calvinist. Rather than Unconditional Election, it is One-conditional Election. Rather than Perseverance of the Saints, it is actually claiming the saint is saved even though he doesn't persevere. Calvin would not accept either of these claims.
- b) While Calvinism allows that the regenerate will not live perfectly, it does not teach that someone can live in any manner he pleases and go to heaven.
- (1) "9. Remission of Sins Always Necessary for the Faithful  
 "Finally, we acknowledge that this regeneration is so effected in us that, until we slough off this moral body, there remains always in us much imperfection and infirmity, so that we always remain poor and wretched sinners in the presence of God. And, however much we ought day by day to increase and grow in God's righteousness, there will never be plenitude or perfection while we live here. Thus we always have need of the mercy of God to obtain the remission of our faults and offences [sic]. And so we ought always to look for our righteousness in Jesus Christ and not at all in ourselves, and in him be confident and assured, putting no faith in our works." (Theological Treatises, "The Geneva Confession," p 28)
- (2) "Now I readily concede that if there should be found a totally regenerated man, then there would not be any sin in him. But the point is to know whether regeneration has ever been perfected in a mortal life. I say that since the creation of the world not a single example has appeared.  
 "Thus Saint John's words mean nothing other than that insofar as man is regenerated by God, he no longer sins. But inasmuch as that only partially occurs, so long as we live in this world, let us not fret that we have not yet come to the end of that road which we travel.  
 "Someone might reply that this advice seems to be contradictory, that is, to interpret Saint John's words in this way. And indeed it does appear that in context Saint John's intention is different. To this I reply that Saint John does mean to signify that once a man is regenerate, sin no longer reigns. For the grace of God's Spirit ought to be superior to subdue carnal affection. Nevertheless we must always come back to this point, that a man is free of the bondage of sin according to the measure of grace which he has received, which is more in some and less in others. But this measure is never full in anyone, whoever he might be." (Against Anabaptists and Libertines, pp 269-270)
- (3) "But, it seems, injury is done to Christ, if, under the pretence [sic] of his grace, good works are repudiated; He having come to prepare a people acceptable to God, zealous of good works, while to the same effect, are many similar passages which prove that Christ came in order that we, doing good works, might, through Him, be accepted by God. This calumny, which our opponents have ever in their mouths, viz., that we take away the desire of well-doing from the Christian life by recommending gratuitous righteousness, is too frivolous to give us much concern. We deny that good works have any share in justification, but we claim full authority for them in the lives of the righteous. For if he who has obtained justification possesses Christ, and at the same time, Christ never is where His Spirit is not, it is obvious that gratuitous righteousness is necessarily [sic] connected with regeneration. Therefore, if you would duly understand how inseparable faith and works are, look to Christ, who, as the Apostle teaches (I Cor. i. 30) has been given to us for justification and for sanctification. Wherever, therefore, that righteousness of faith, which we maintain to be gratuitous, is, there too Christ is, and where Christ is, there too is the Spirit of holiness, who regenerates to newness of life. On the contrary, where zeal for integrity and holiness is not in vigor there neither is the Spirit of Christ nor Christ Himself; and wherever Christ is not, there is no righteousness, nay, there is no faith; for faith cannot apprehend Christ for righteousness without the Spirit of sanctification." (A Reformation Debate, p 68)
- (4) "Those who are born again think differently from those who are not, precisely because they have been regenerated; regenerated people will begin to live out the superior moral life of Christ. No one believes on Christ who has not been given a new nature, and although that new nature does not show itself completely all at once, if we are justified, we have it and it will increasingly and inevitably express itself in forgiveness of and service to others, just as God has forgiven and done good to us. We are not justified by works. But if we do not do good works, we are not justified." (Boice, Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace, p 119)

- (5) Thus the tenet of Perseverance of the Saints in true Calvinism is not permission to pursue sin because one is part of the elect. Rather, it is the teaching that because someone is elect, he will persevere in serving Christ faithfully (though not perfectly) until the very end.
- (6) In other words, in Calvinism, Christians are not free to live in any manner whatsoever and still go to heaven. Rather, because they are the elect, they will obey God's will and persevere in faithfulness.
5. However, Calvinism so ties the perseverance of Christians to the irresistible grace as to claim God's saving grace is inescapable.
- a) "But not one of those whom Christ has once ingrafted [sic] into his body will he ever permit to perish, for in securing their salvation, he will perform what he has promised; that is, exert a divine power greater than all (John x. 28). For when he says, "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition (John xvii. 12), the expression, though there is a catachresis in it, is not at all ambiguous. The sum is, that God by gratuitous adoption forms those whom he wishes to have for sons; but that the intrinsic cause is in himself, because he is contented with his secret pleasure." (*Institutes*, v II pp 219-220)
- b) "One thing remains, that whatever grace is bestowed on us to the very end of our lives is freely bestowed on us, not repaid for our gratitude, as though by using earlier favours [sic] well we merit this of ourselves. This is confirmed by Augustine in the following way: 'I have shown quite clearly that the grace to begin and to persevere to the end is not given according to our merits, but is granted according to his own most secret and at the same time most just, most kind, and most wise will, since those whom he predestined he also called.'" (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 134)
- c) "In addition, this grace is not of such a kind as to bestow on [its recipients] the power to act well on condition that they will to, so that they thereafter have the option of willing or not willing. But it effectively moves them to will it; indeed it makes their evil will good, so that they of necessity will well. In addition, this does not happen once, so that people are subsequently left to themselves, but they are steered on a steady course, so that their perseverance in goodness is no less the gift of God than their beginning it. Moreover, in taking people up for direction by his Spirit, and in continuing to direct them, after he has taken them up, till the very end of their lives, and in confirming them in perseverance, God is led by only one consideration. This is his own free goodness without respect for any merit at all, since in fact they can have no merit, either in their works or in their wills or even in their thoughts." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 136)
- d) "There follows the third point, on the effective operation of grace. [In the *Institutes*] I say, then, that grace is not offered to us in such a way that afterwards we have the option either to submit or to resist. I say that it is not given merely to aid our weakness by its support as though anything depended on us apart from it. But I demonstrate that it is entirely the work of grace and a benefit conferred by it that our heart is changed from a stony one to one of flesh, that our will is made new, and that we, created anew in heart and mind, at length will what we ought to will. For Paul bears witness that God does not bring about in us [merely] that we are able to will what is good, but also that we should will it right up to the completion of the act. How big a difference there is between performance and will! Likewise I determine that our will is effectively formed so that it necessarily follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, and not that it is sufficiently encouraged to be able to so if it wills. "Moreover, what we say about one action should be extended to cover our whole life. For it would not be enough if God guided man's heart once, and did not always maintain it in a similar way and strengthen it to persevere. Now in treating perseverance, I remind you, we must beware of two things. We must not imagine that man, by some power of his own, cooperates with God when he obeys the direction of the Spirit. And we must not suppose that subsequent grace is paid to him as a reward, as though by using the earlier well he has merited it. For I do not allow that human beings have any ability but that which has been given to them. And [I say] that God unceasingly so accomplishes his work in them that whatever he bestows on them right to the end is freely given--unless perhaps with Augustine we prefer to call it a reward because it is grace in exchange for grace, because God constantly adds to his kindness to the elect by giving them new gifts." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 174)
- e) "The same thought I also apply [in the *Institutes*] to perseverance: as the beginning, so also the completion of good works depends on God alone. And [I say], lest man fail, he is strengthened in such a

way by the power of God that the course of pure, undeserved grace continues right up to the end of his life. Nor does man of himself cooperate with God so that some contribution of his own is added in, but [man cooperates] only in accordance with the measure which he has received, so that he acts only to the extent that he is acted upon." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 178)

- f) "Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated." (*The Canons of Dort*, "The Fifth Head of Doctrine," Article 8)
  - g) "All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end." (Steele and Thomas, p 18)
  - h) "The simplest, shortest description of the perseverance of the saints is: Once Saved, always saved. It is one of the grandest thoughts in the Bible: Once you believe, you can never be lost, you can never go to hell. Christ will always be your Savior. It is possible to get your eternal destiny settled once for all so that you never have to worry about it...The term *perseverance of the saints* emphasizes that Christians—saints, as Paul calls them in his letters—will persevere in trusting Christ as their Savior. They will not turn on and then turn off, but they will continue believing forever. Thus they will always be saved...It is possible, however, to use another term to describe this fact, namely the perseverance of God. It is because God perseveres in His love toward His church that the church perseveres in its love toward Him." (Palmer, p 68)
6. The Bible teaches that people who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit can in fact abandon the Lord and be cut off from His saving grace. While I cannot imagine why anyone would want to escape the saving grace of Jesus, the Bible teaches they have the ability.
- a) "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (**Galatians 5:4**).
    - (1) While some Calvinists try to distract us by talking about who it is that is severed and falls, the important point is that it does happen. No matter who this person is that is severed or fallen, they have still been cut off and they have still fallen. As many have said before, you can't fall from what you aren't standing on, and you can't be severed from what you aren't connected to.
  - b) "For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire'" (**II Peter 2:20-22**).
    - (1) Notice, this person has escaped the defilements of the world. That is, he has been delivered from sin.
    - (2) Notice, this person escaped by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They did not just appear to escape, they knew Jesus and that knowledge really set them free.
    - (3) Notice, this person actually knew the way of righteousness.
    - (4) Notice, the last state is worse than the first. The first state is being defiled by the world. If this person is still part of the elect, heaven bound, and saved, then his last state is not worse than his first.
  - c) "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed and its end is to be burned" (**Hebrews 6:4-8**).

- (1) As with **Galatians 5:4**, Calvinists often try to distract us from some simple aspects of this passage. They will highlight the statement that it is “impossible...to restore them again to repentance,” arguing that taken in a straightforward way this passage proves too much. Therefore, it can’t mean someone has actually fallen away from their share in the Holy Spirit.
  - (2) While I certainly admit part of understanding this passage means figuring out what is impossible here, that doesn’t change the fact that it describes a person who has tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the Word of God and has now fallen from it.
    - (a) By the way, the Hebrew writer is not, I believe, saying someone who has abandoned the Lord can never repent. Rather, he says it is impossible for us to renew them to repentance. That is, since they have tasted all the goodness of being in Christ and sharing in the Holy Spirit, we have no other tool in our belt with which to persuade them to repentance.
    - (b) It is not impossible for God to renew them to repentance. After all, all things are possible for God (cf **Matthew 19:26**).
    - (c) It is not impossible for them to repent. But it is impossible for us to renew them.
  - (3) Further, in the illustration, the Hebrew writer says this person’s end is to be burned like the thorns and thistles.
  - (4) It says this person is crucifying the Son of God again. This person...is like the crowd that hollered, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” That is, He has made Christ’s sacrifice useless to himself, despite having been saved by it.
7. Before we leave this point, let’s consider two major objections to this point.
- a) If a gift can be taken away, it isn’t a gift. Or said another way, a gift with strings attached is no gift at all.
    - (1) This is actually an anachronistic concept. Perhaps because of 500 years of Reformed theology or perhaps because of the pervasiveness of modern pop psychology, our culture has come to expect this. However, it is clearly evident that in the Bible, folks didn’t think this way.
    - (2) Biblically, it is clear that gifts actually demanded responsibility. They didn’t demand a response of paying back, but they did demand a response.
      - (a) Consider what God said to Israel about the gift of the Promised Land. As demonstrated earlier in this outline, God made it clear that not only was He giving the land to Israel, He had already given it to them. Yet repeatedly God tells Israel if they do not respond properly to His gift, the gift of the land will be taken away (cf. **Deuteronomy 4:26; 11:17; 30:18; Joshua 23:16**).
      - (b) Consider what God said to Eli in **I Samuel 2:30**. Though God had promised Eli’s house would “go in and out before me forever,” He also said, “Far be it from me, for those who honor me, I will honor; and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”
      - (c) Consider Jesus’s story of the unforgiving servant in **Matthew 18:23-35**. The servant had asked for forgiveness. He had asked for patience as he tried to pay off the debt. But the king had given the gift of forgiveness. Calvinists can say all they want about the nature of gifts; in this story, we see how Jesus viewed gifts. Gifts demand responsibilities. This king believed the proper response to his gift of forgiveness was to pass that same gift on to others. When the servant didn’t, the king revoked the gift.
  - b) God has given us eternal life, if we can die again, then the life isn’t eternal it is temporary, isn’t it?
    - (1) Do you remember what I said about words at the beginning of this long section of the outline (III.A.1)? Words don’t have meanings, they have uses. Further, words don’t mean things, we mean things by words.
    - (2) This is exactly the problem with this argument. Those who make this argument are trying to bank on holding God to some dictionary definition of “eternal life” that they think makes their case. The problem is we cannot figure out what this “eternal life” means by applying the dictionary definition we like to it. Rather we need to examine how it is used biblically in order to determine what God means by it.
    - (3) Does God mean by it that when we believe we are given life and since it is eternal life, it is impossible to die again otherwise it is temporary life?

- (4) No. This is clear from **Romans 6:15-19**. Paul is making his case that these Christians who are under grace must not continue in sin because they are under grace. Why? Because if they do, they will once again become enslaved to sin and that leads to death.
  - (a) Please no smokescreen arguments claiming that Paul's point is the regenerate are incapable of turning to sin again because that would mean those who have eternal life would die. That is simply begging the question, assuming what you must prove.
  - (b) Paul expresses a conditional statement. If you obey sin, it will lead to death. Therefore, he gives a direction, don't submit yourselves to obey sin, but submit yourselves as slaves to righteousness.
  - (c) Again I remind you of **II Peter 2:20-22** that demonstrates this exact same point.
- 8. In summary, God's saving grace is empowering. It does strengthen us to grow in Christ and overcome sin. In fact, we cannot grow in Christ and overcome sin apart from it. However, it is not inescapable. We are not irresistibly ensnared in saving grace. We can abandon it. But why would we want to?

#### IV. The dangers posed by Calvinism.

##### A. Over reaction

1. The first two dangers I present are dangers regarding our reaction to Calvinism.
2. One of the hardest tracks to follow is the narrow road between two ditches. When riding the pendulum, it is almost impossible to stop it on the center mark. Instead, we ride it from one extreme to another. Therefore, I think the biggest danger Calvinism poses us is the threat of overreacting to its error.
3. It seems to me that Calvinism and Reformed theology was an overreaction to Catholicism.
  - a) Consider the following statements in Calvin's response to Jacopo Sadoletto, a Roman Catholic Cardinal. These statements come from a section of Calvin's response in which he imagines what kind of responses the leaders of the Reformation and their disciples would give to God when He asks them to defend their decision to leave the Roman Catholic Church.
    - (1) "They, indeed, called Thee the only God, but it was while transferring to others the glory which Thou hast claimed for thy Majesty. They figured and had themselves as many gods as they had saints, whom they chose to worship. The Christ was indeed worshipped as God, and retained the name of Savior; but where He ought to have been honored, He was left almost without honor. For, spoiled by His own virtue, He passed unnoticed among the crowd of saints, like one of the meanest of them." ([A Reformation Debate](#), pp 82-83)
    - (2) "They, indeed, preached of thy clemency towards men, but confined it to those who should show themselves deserving of it. They moreover placed this desert in the righteousness of works, so that he only was received into thy favor who reconciled himself to Thee by works. Nor, meanwhile, did they disguise the fact, that we are miserable sinners, that we often fall through infirmity of the flesh, and that to all, therefore, thy mercy behooved to be the common haven of salvation; but the method of obtaining it, which they pointed out, was by making satisfaction to Thee for offenses. Then, the satisfaction enjoined was, first, after confessing all our sins to a priest, suppliantly to ask pardon and absolution; and, secondly, by good to efface from thy remembrance our bad actions. Lastly, in order to supply what was still wanting, we were to add sacrifices and solemn expiations. Then, because Thou wert a stern judge and strict avenger of iniquity, they showed how dreadful thy presence must be. Hence they bade us flee first to the saints, that by their intercession Thou mightiest be rendered exorable and propitious to us" ([A Reformation Debate](#), pp 87-88)
  - b) Seeing what Calvin and the Reformers were trying to correct, I can almost understand why they taught what they did. Catholicism, with its web of venial and mortal sins, purgatory, indulgences, penance, and practical idolatry can hardly be seen as anything other than trying to earn salvation and diminish God's glory. It is not surprising at all that in trying to argue against it, the Reformers responded with a teaching that removed the concept of any human action or work being involved. Further, when argued against taking God's glory and giving it to another based on the prayers to the saints, it is no surprise they rode the pendulum to the extreme of claiming even obeying God is stealing His glory.

4. The danger then is that in our haste to defend against Calvinistic excesses and misapplications of grace, we over react and seem to remove as much of God from our salvation as the Calvinists remove our free and voluntary submission to Him from it.
5. The fact is both Calvinists and we see the need for God's grace and the need for our submission. Both of us see the need to glorify God by giving Him credit where credit is due, but also the need to glorify Him by doing things His way.
  - a) "I have also no difficulty in conceding to you that there is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God. The primary rudiments by which we are wont to train to piety those whom we wish to gain as disciples to Christ are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which He himself approved from the beginning. For we maintain what the sacred oracle declared, that obedience is more excellent than any sacrifice (1 Sam xv. 22). In short, we train them by every means to be contented with the one rule of worship which they have received from His mouth, and bid adieu to all fictitious worship." (*A Reformation Debate*, p 59)
6. However, as we try to dissect and quantify God's saving grace from our submitting obedience, holding all that is in the above point in our minds, trying to make all facets of salvation fit together, we are each in danger of dissecting out an integral part of salvation.
  - a) "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (**Philippians 2:12-13**).
  - b) "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me as not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me...Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:10, 58**).
  - c) Is salvation our work or God's? Paul's answer is, "Yes." But the Calvinists, as they dissect and quantify grace, dissect out our working, making our work all God's.
  - d) If we are not careful, as we dissect and quantify God's saving grace, we will over react and cut out all of God's work, having a kind of deistic view of salvation in which God sent Jesus long ago, and then backed out of the process to merely see what we would do with it. If we are not careful, we will come up with a near Roman Catholic system of stipulated prayers, public confessions, and necessary rituals in order to be more worthy of salvation than others and demonstrate to God that we really are okay and should be allowed into heaven. After all, we've been trying really hard, surely that should count for something in judgment.

#### B. Misrepresentation

1. Next year will mark 500 years since Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of that German church. That is a long time for his teaching and Calvin's, which were so similar, to get convoluted. Some have perhaps intensified it (being called HyperCalvinists). Others have relaxed it, only accepting the TiPs of the TULIP as it were. Further, the Arminian Remonstrants themselves accepted Original Sin and were open to Perseverance of the Saints. From our perspective, anyone who accepts any aspect of Calvinistic doctrine can appear to be a Calvinist. Therefore we can tend to lump all that they say together and treat it all like Reformed Theology or Calvinism.
2. That is as unfair and inappropriate for us to do as it is for Muslims to assume Roman Catholicism represents biblical Christianity.
3. The danger, as in approaching any debate, is that we will build up straw men, merely to knock them down and believe we have defeated Calvinism. This may seem obvious since, as I said, this is an obvious danger for any debate over doctrinal differences. However, I believe this is not merely a danger that might happen, but is a precipice many of us have already fallen over.
4. As seen in the previous parts of the outline, Calvinism does not teach the following things that are often attributed to it. And despite what some Christians have said, none of these are even logical conclusions of the five tenets of Calvinism.
  - a) A moment of faith or a prayer saves us.
  - b) Christians can pursue sin and abandon God's law and still go to heaven.
  - c) Christians don't have to obey God's law.

- d) It is useless to preach the gospel because whatever God has predestined is going to happen no matter what we do.
  - e) Christians are led by the inner prodding of the Holy Spirit.
  - f) As long as one believes in Jesus or calls Him Lord, it doesn't matter how he lives.
  - g) Baptism is unnecessary (though admittedly, most Calvinists do say this, Calvin did not say this).
  - h) Folks can just wait around dilly-dallying in sin, waiting for God to choose them and make them obey.
  - i) And more, but these should make the point.
5. In fact, I believe it is possible for someone who accepts the five tenets of Calvinism to live and worship God exactly as "we" believe, teach, and practice.
  6. Consider the following statement by Calvin.
    - a) "If we look at the administration of human affairs with the eye of sense, we will have no doubt that, so far, they are placed at man's disposal; but if we lend an ear to the many passages of Scripture which proclaim that in these matters the minds of men are ruled by God, they will compel us to place human choice in subordination to his special influence." (*Institutes*, v 1, p 269)
    - b) Do you see that Calvin admits that for all intents and purposes life for the Christian will look like his affairs are placed at his own disposal? As far as it seems to us, we do have to choose to obey God. We do have to believe and accept His Word. We are responsible for submission. Where the theological package of Calvinism diverts from the truth is behind the scenes, whittling on God's end of the stick. To Calvin, though it seems like this, he believes the Bible teaches God is working behind the scenes so that it is not actually the way that it seems. We, however, are still supposed to act based on the way it seems, but give glory to God when we're done.
  7. I actually wonder if we quit arguing with straw men, if we might not be able to take some of the actual statements from Calvin and convince people to choose to obey God the Biblical way. After all, Calvin does challenge people to pursue God. He challenges them to worship God's way (though obviously some of His understanding about how to worship God are unscriptural, but that is not because of the 5 tenets, that is just misunderstanding Scripture on those issues). He challenges them to examine Scripture and live by it. He challenges them to preach and teach the Word of God. He even demonstrates that baptism is necessary and the point at which salvation is applied in reality. Granted, he is mixed up about infant baptism, but as John Piper proves you don't have to be a pedobaptist to be Calvinist.
- C. Saying what is wrong about God even though we have proper motives
1. The previous two dangers were threats that we face as we respond to Calvinism. The remainder are threats and dangers among those who accept Calvinism. These are reasons we don't want to simply sweep Calvinism under the rug.
  2. In the last point, we demonstrated that as far as a package, the dangers of the system of Calvinism are not really about what we should tell people to do and how to behave. It is actually about whittling on God's end of the stick.
  3. Having said that, I believe the Calvinistic motivation is noble. The entire system is predicated on the desire to give God every bit of glory He deserves and take none of His glory away. However, if I'm correct about Calvinism despite their noble motives, they are misrepresenting God. I can allow God to determine the eternal destiny of someone who obeys Him properly while misunderstanding the behind the scenes workings of the process.
  4. However, when I consider **Job 42:7**, the misrepresentation still frightens me.
    - a) "After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'"
    - b) Job's three friends had noble motives. They thought Job was attacking the glory of God and His righteousness. Their desire was to defend the glory of God. But they were wrong. Their noble motives did not assuage God's anger.
  5. Therefore, we should not sweep the systemization of Calvinism under the rug even if a person is practically living exactly as we believe a New Testament Christian should.
  6. What a misrepresentation.
    - a) Calvinism's representation of God doesn't seem to me like a minor one. It seems to me to represent God as a monster.

- b) Imagine giving birth to four children. You know that each of them is destined for eternal torment. The only thing that will save them is your choice. They can't save themselves. Oh sure, they all deserve the eternal torment. None of them deserve any kind of salvation any more than the others do. But you only choose 1 of them to be saved. You could save all 4, but you only love and choose 1. And top that off with the fact that the only reason you did that was to prove beyond doubt that the choice was yours and not theirs. If we weren't talking about God in a theological system that has dominated the religious world for hundreds of years, we would call that father a monster. But call it Calvinism and attribute it to God, and you have theology. That just doesn't make sense to me.
- c) Granted, the fact that I don't like it doesn't make it false. But the fact that it doesn't jibe with the Biblical picture of what a loving father is like does. **Matthew 7:7-11** demonstrates our heavenly Father is the epitome of good fatherhood. In fact, it makes the nature of good fatherhood a means of explaining the nature of God. Good fatherhood is tantamount to knowing how to give good gifts. Thus, a father who gives a good gift of life to one child while leaving the rest to torment is a monster.
- d) Of course, in **Matthew 7:7-11**, not all children receive the good gift. But why? Because only some ask for the good gift. Calvinists will of course claim that is so in their system as well. However, in Calvinism the asking is part of the gift itself. In Calvinism the three didn't ask because the father did not choose to give them the gift of asking. It still becomes a sad picture of terrible, awful fatherhood.
- e) Why would we take what would be the epitome of bad fatherhood in any other father we know (only choosing 1 out of 4 to be saved from eternal torment) and attribute it to God?

#### D. Despair

1. I know this sounds like an odd danger for someone accepting Calvinism. However, despite the press Calvinism receives as the only way to be sure of salvation and being able to rest assured of your salvation without fear or worry, a claim which full on 5-point Reformed Theologian Calvinists make (see III.F.4.h.), there is actually no security in Calvinism.
2. Calvinists do claim we can know we are saved and have full assurance of it.
  - a) "How do you know if you are among the elect?  
"There is only one way to know this, and it is not by trying to peer into the eternal counsels of God, stripping the cover from the book of his divine foreknowledge and predestination. The only way you will ever know if you are among the elect is if you respond to the gospel. The Bible says, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). When you believe in Christ, you can know that God has set his electing love upon you and that, having loved you, he will continue to love you and keep you to the end." (Boice, *The Doctrines of Grace*, pp 143-144)
3. However, Calvinism really has a dirty little secret that is overlooked in these claims of Eternal Security and Assurance.
  - a) "Men preposterously ask how they can be certain of a salvation which lies in the hidden counsel of God...Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge...But divine election is the origin and cause of our faith. But because God is invisible (I Tim 1.17), and dwells in light inaccessible (I Tim 6.16), admitting none to His counsel (Rom 11.34; I Cor 2.16), except the only begotten Son who is eternally in His bosom (Jn 1.18), it is needful to hold the mind of Christ and to be illuminated by faith, in order that it may be clear to us what is the adoption that lies in the heart of God." (*Concerning Eternal Predestination*, pp 126-127)
  - b) "But meanwhile God's secret plan, by which he passes over one and chooses another, remains his own, and one should not inquire too curiously into it if one does not want to be overwhelmed by [God's] glory." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 199)
  - c) "Now, why does the Lord use his mercy toward some and exercise the rigor of his judgment on the others? We have to leave the reason of this to be known to him alone. For, he, with a certainly excellent intention, has willed to keep it hidden from us all." (*Instruction in Faith*, p 36)
  - d) Certainty is actually hidden in God and questioning it too much will overwhelm us.
4. But even more than that, even Calvin and Calvinists have to deal with the practical realities of folks they have seen who looked like they had responded to the gospel in faith and repentance. They looked like they were one of God's elect. However, they are now living in rebellion to God's will, perhaps even having to have been excommunicated from the congregation. What can we say about them? Remember, true

Calvinism does not teach that someone living in rebellion is elect. If you are elect, you will be regenerated and live faithfully, though not perfectly.

- a) Certainly, the case is made that if that person really is one of the elect, God will eventually grant them repentance and bring them visibly back into the fold.
  - (1) “Lorraine Boettner points out that the elect are often like the prodigal son in that they are deluded by the world and led astray by their own corrupt desires. They waste their substance on wrong living. They feed on the world’s husks, which do not satisfy. But sooner or later they come to their senses and say, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you’ (Luke 15:17-18). And when they return they find a loving Father and a joyful reception. Boettner says that ‘this is a thoroughly Calvinistic parable in that the prodigal was a son and could not lose that relationship. Those who are not sons never have the desire to arise and go to the Father.’” (Boice, The Doctrines of Grace, pp 156-157; quoting Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia, 1963, p 189)
- b) However, there is really only one way to be completely certain.
  - (1) “In fact, the final perseverance of believers is the only ultimate proof that we have been chosen by God and truly have been born again.” (Boice, The Doctrines of Grace, pp 157)
  - (2) In other words, the only time I can actually be certain is after I’m dead and I actually lived faithfully my whole life.
  - (3) The Calvinist will of course say, “If I’m being faithful right now, I don’t have to be afraid that if I died right now I’d go to hell. I can be certain of my eternal destiny even though I’ve messed up and done things wrong and sinned because it is about God’s election not my perfection.”
- c) Having said the above we may still think the Calvinists have a leg up on assurance. However, I assure you they do not.
  - (1) First, we can be certain we are eternally saved right now even though we haven’t been perfect outside of Calvinistic doctrine. At least we can if Paul’s testimony can be trusted. According to **Philippians 3:12**, Paul claimed he was imperfect. He could think of mistakes and sins he was still struggling with. However, in **Philippians 1:23**, Paul claimed if he died he was certain he was going to be with Christ.
    - (a) Are you in Christ? Are you drawing near to God? Are you growing in grace and knowledge? Are you not allowing grace to be a license to sin? Then even though you still have areas where you still need to grow in knowledge, faith, virtue, self-control, brotherly kindness, and love, you, like Paul can be certain you are going to heaven when you die. This is, of course, not permission to sin, but it is permission to hang on to Christ even when you stumble (cf. **I John 2:1**)
  - (2) Second, the Calvinists actually do not have this assurance at all. Consider the following statement carefully.
    - (a) “Therefore, while we all labour [sic] naturally under the same disease, those only recover health to whom the Lord is pleased to put forth his healing hand. The others whom, in just judgment, he passes over, pine and rot away till they are consumed. And this is the only reason why some persevere to the end, and others, after beginning their course, fall away. Perseverance is the gift of God, which he does not lavish promiscuously on all, but imparts to whom he pleases. If it is asked how the difference arises—why some steadily persevere, and others prove deficient in steadfastness—we can give no other reason than that the Lord, by his mighty power, strengthens and sustains the former, so that they perish not, while he does not furnish the same assistance to the latter, but leaves them to be monuments of instability.” (Institutes, v 1 p 275)
    - (b) In Calvinism, I am always burdened with the fear that I am just a monument of instability. I may appear to be elect, faithfully responding today, but tomorrow, God may withdraw His assistance for some hidden reason, allowing those who really are the elect to be reminded how fortunate they are that they aren’t like me and how much glory they need to give God because He didn’t withdraw His hand from them. But probably it will just give them fear that they might be next.

d) Sadly, I've heard many Christians act like they just aren't sure if they are going to be faithful to the Lord in the future, so they just aren't sure where they are going to be in the end. But this is mixing up the idea that we have to be perfect, with the truth that we need to be faithful to the Lord.

(1) I'm certain of several things about my future.

(a) I'm going to sin again.

(b) I have an advocate with the Father in Jesus Christ the righteous.

(c) I'm going to hang on to my advocate Jesus gaining strength and help from him to overcome my sin. Therefore, though I fall, He will uphold me with His right hand (**Psalm 37:23-24**).

(d) God has promised to conform me to the image of His Son (**Romans 8:29**) and restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish me (**1 Peter 5:10**). Additionally, since God has already sacrificed His Son to reconcile me to Him, I know there is nothing He will withhold from me so that I may have life eternal (**Romans 8:32**).

(e) I'm going to put my faith in God's promises instead of my abilities.

(f) Therefore, I am certain about my eternal destiny.

(g) And if I decide to abandon all of these certainties sometime in my unforeseeable future, I am certain that it will be because I removed my hand from God's, not because He could not hold on to me or because He withdrew His hand.

(2) The Calvinist, however, has none of these certainties. He seems faithful today, but he may just be an object lesson for the true elect. He can only look at his future with great fear that God may knock his legs out from under Him.

5. Therefore, the danger of accepting Calvinism is losing all assurance of salvation. Shocking. I know.

#### E. Limiting God's glory

1. No doubt Calvinist's believe their theological system simply comes from Bible passages. However, the reality is the claim of the TULIP actually stems from the philosophical commitments Calvinists bring to those Biblical passages. That philosophical underpinning is the idea that if man has any capacity for good, for right, even if just to open his own hand to grasp hold of a gift God is holding in his face, then to that decree He takes God's glory on to himself.

2. This neglects that we are the creation of God.

a) Any ability we have is therefore obviously the gift of God. To use the abilities with which God has created us is not at all to take away from God's glory but is to surrender to it.

b) We should all freely admit that we can do nothing apart from God's gift. I cannot walk apart from God's gift. I cannot breathe apart from God's gift. I cannot move apart from God's gift (cf. **Acts 17:28**). But, as anathema as this is to Calvinists, God has granted some level of ability to all mankind.

c) Included in that common ability is the ability to receive or to reject God's saving grace.

3. This ignores the state of Adam and Eve before the fall.

a) Did Adam and Eve's submission to God before their fall detract from God's glory?

b) Consider what Augustine said, quoted by Calvin: "The first man did not have that grace through which he would never wish to be evil. But he had grace which was such that if he were willing to remain under its control he would never be evil, and without which, even possessing free choice, he could not be good. But he could by free choice abandon it. This is the original grace which was given to the first Adam, but [the grace given] in the second Adam is more powerful, and by it one is even caused to will, and to will so much, and to love with such ardour [sic] that through the will of the Spirit he overcomes the will of the flesh which lusts against it. That [first grace], which shows the power of free choice, was certainly not a small thing. For [free choice] was helped in such a way that without this help it would not remain in a good state, but it could, if it so willed, abandon this help. But the second is so much the greater that for man merely to recover his lost freedom through it would be insufficient, and, finally, for it merely to make it possible for him either to perceive the good or to persist in it, if he willed it, would be insufficient. What it requires is that he also be caused to will [the good] by it." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 177)

c) Even Augustine and Calvin explain that Adam had grace from God enough to choose to avoid evil. They claim he had free choice. Did Adam's free choice deny God's glory? Of course not.

- d) Of course, their argument is a smokescreen because Calvin did believe Adam also had to sin by necessity (though he claims it was still voluntarily) because God had foreordained it and eternally decreed that it was to happen.
  - e) However, the incorrupt nature and free choice of Adam and Eve lead me to ask, why does it have to be different for us to preserve the sovereignty and glory of God? If God was still sovereign and glorified when Adam chose to remain under His grace, why would we argue that God is not glorified when we choose to pursue God's grace?
4. Thus, Calvinism limits the glory of God.
- a) In Calvinism, there is a lot of debate about the meaning of words like "necessary," "voluntary," "willing," "coercion," and "force." It provides a great amount of smokescreen by which Calvin tries to establish that unregenerate man sins because he can't help it, but it is still his fault. And further tries to establish that regenerate man obeys God because he wants to, but it is not at all to his credit.
  - b) At this point, Calvin will make a distinction between a human being and a stone.
    - (1) "But [Pighius says] Augustine denies that grace is sufficient without free choice, as well as that free choice is sufficient without grace. I agree, but all that he means is that God is working in a human being, and not in a stone, since he has a will, born and prepared for willing, as they say. By bending it to the good, [God] makes good the will which by the corruption of nature is wicked and perverted. So it is just as if he said that a human being cannot will well unless he already has a will, and it is self-determined. Since he has the latter from nature and the former from grace, Augustine rightly says that without free choice there is no room for grace. For what the term 'free choice' means for him has already been seen. If you want this explained to you more clearly, think of it like this: the human will is like matter which has been subjected to the working of grace, so that it may receive its form from it. So it follows that the will with its self-determined movement comes from nature, wickedness from the corruption of nature, [while] goodness results from the grace of the Holy Spirit and so is his own work." (*Bondage and Liberation*, p 115)
    - (2) Give Calvin another 500 years and he might have had to consider another illustration—the automaton, the robot, the computer program. In the system of Calvinism, man may not be a stone because God gave him a will, but man is a computer program only doing what God's eternal decree programed him to will.
  - c) In the end, what all of this demonstrates is the only being in existence that gives glory to God is God Himself. There is no other who is actually and truly impressed by God. The ones who are impressed with Him are so only because God foreordained that they would be. The ones who are impressed with God are so only because God worked in their spirit such that they would want to be impressed by God and give Him glory.
  - d) Is it truly limiting God's glory for God to allow men to choose to be impressed by Him and then to bring Him glory? Calvinism doesn't allow that kind of glory for God. They only glory of God that Calvinism allows is self-glory. Thus, despite the claims, Calvinism limits God's glory.
5. There is no doubt the God of the universe deserves glory. Further, there is no doubt that as God He is well within His rights to seek glorification. But truly, what kind of God is He if the only way He can be glorified is by His own eternal decree and predestination? He actually receives more and greater glory when He creates man with the ability to choose to want Him and is glorified when we freely, willingly, voluntarily, and unnecessarily give Him glory by seeking and submitting to Him.

#### F. Denying baptism for the remission of sins

- 1. I don't include this danger because it naturally or even logically follows from Calvinism that baptism for the remission of sins is unnecessary or not required. Rather, I include it because on a practical level, every one I've ever met who claims to be a Calvinist denies the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins, thus denying salvation to all who listen to them.
- 2. I know on the surface that sounds odd. We've heard "faith alone" arguments against the need for baptism for so long in connection with Calvinism that we've simply accepted it almost without question. However, I believe the issue is a little more complex than that.
- 3. First, Calvin does argue strongly that justification is by faith and does not include works.
  - a) "I answer that Paul, whenever he attributes to [faith] the power of justifying, at the same time restricts it to a gratuitous promise of the divine favor, and keeps it far removed from all respect to

- works. Hence his familiar inference--if by faith, then not by works. On the other hand--if by works, then not by faith." (A Reformation Debate, p 67)
- b) "And, however much we ought day by day to increase and grow in God's righteousness, there will never be plenitude or perfection while we live here. Thus we always have need of the mercy of God to obtain the remission of our faults and offences [sic]. And so we ought always to look for our righteousness in Jesus Christ and not at all in ourselves, and in him be confident and assured, putting no faith in our works." (Theological Treatises, "The Geneva Confession," p 28)
- c) "How do we prove that some men are gratuitously elect, unless because God illumines whom He will by His Spirit, so that by faith they are engrafted into the body of Christ?" (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 127)
- d) "Just as the merciful Father offers us the Son through the word of the Gospel, so we embrace him through faith and acknowledge him as given to us. It is true that the word of the Gospel calls all to participate in Christ, but a number, blinded and hardened by unbelief, despise such a unique grace. Hence, only believers enjoy Christ; they receive him as sent to them; they do not reject him when he is given, but follow him when he calls them." (Instruction in Faith, p 35)
- e) "For we are said to be justified through faith, not in the sense, however, that we receive within us any righteousness, but because the righteousness of Christ is credited to us, entirely as if it were really ours, while our iniquity is not charged to us, so that one can truly call this righteousness simply the remission of sins." (Instruction in Faith, p 40-41)
4. However, the faith is not saving faith, it is a gift from saving grace. In other words, it is not a condition for salvation and election but a fruit of them.
- a) "M[inister]: Do we conceive faith of ourselves or do we receive it from God?  
 "C[hild]: Scripture teaches that it is a special gift of God, and experience confirms this.  
 "M: Tell me what experience you mean.  
 "C: Our mind is too rude to be able to grasp the spiritual wisdom of God which is revealed to us through faith; and our hearts are too prone to distrust or to perverse confidence in ourselves or other creatures to rest of their own accord in God. But the Holy Spirit by his illumination makes us capable of understanding those things which would otherwise far exceed our grasp, and brings us to a sure persuasion by sealing the promises of salvation in our hearts.  
 "M: What advantage accrues to us from faith, when once we have obtained it?  
 "C: It justifies us in the sight of God, and this justification makes us heirs of eternal life.  
 "M: What? Are men not justified by good works, when they study to approve themselves before God by holy and righteous living?  
 "C: If anyone could be found perfect to this degree, he might be reckoned just on merit. But since we are all sinners, guilty in many ways before God, we must seek elsewhere that worthiness which may reconcile us with him.  
 "M: But are all men's works so despicable and worthless that they are unable to obtain favour with God?  
 "C: First, whatever works proceed from us as properly to be called our own are vicious; then further, they can do nothing but displease God and be rejected by him.  
 "M: You say then that, before we are reborn and remade by the Spirit of God, we are able to do nothing but sin, just as the bad tree produces only bad fruit (Matt. 7:17).  
 "C: Precisely so. For whatever appearance they may have in the eyes of men, they are none the less evil so long as the heart, to which God chiefly looks, is depraved.  
 "M: Hence you conclude that we cannot anticipate God by any merits, or evoke his beneficence. Rather, whatever works we proffer or attempt fall under his wrath and condemnation.  
 "C: That is what I think. It is therefore by his sheer mercy and not in respect of works that he graciously embraces us in Christ and holds us acceptable, by attributing to us his accepted righteousness as if it were our own, and by not imputing our sins to us (Tit. 3:5)." (Theological Treatises, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," p 105-106)
- b) "While the elect receive the grace of adoption by faith, their election does not depend on faith but is prior in time and order." (Theological Treatises, "Articles Concerning Predestination," p 179)

- c) "As the beginning of faith and perseverance in it arises from the gratuitous election of God, none are truly illuminated with faith, and none granted the spirit of regeneration, except those whom God elects. But it is necessary that the reprobate remain in their blindness or be deprived of such portion of faith as is in them." (Theological Treatises, "Articles Concerning Predestination," p 179)
  - d) "But divine election is the origin and cause of our faith. But because God is invisible (I Tim 1.17), and dwells in light inaccessible (I Tim 6.16), admitting none to His counsel (Rom 11.34; I Cor 2.16), except the only begotten Son who is eternally in His bosom (Jn 1.18), it is needful to hold the mind of Christ and to be illuminated by faith, in order that it may be clear to us what is the adoption that lies in the heart of God. If anyone will have it put more bluntly, election is prior to faith, but is learnt by faith." (Concerning Eternal Predestination, p 127)
  - e) "If we honestly consider within ourselves how much our thought is blind to the heavenly secrets of God and how greatly our heart distrusts all things, we shall not doubt that faith greatly surpasses all the power of our nature and that faith is a unique and precious gift of God." (Instruction in Faith, p 39)
5. In other words, though some of the people we talk to who claim to be Calvinists may say "Faith Alone" as if faith is the only condition, the "Faith Alone" of Unconditional Election should not be viewed as the "Faith Alone" of One-conditional election expressed by some Arminians.
- a) "Forgiveness/salvation is applied at the moment of faith. It is not the same thing as faith. And its permanence is not contingent upon the permanence of one's faith." (Stanley, p 80)
  - b) "You and I are not saved because we have enduring faith. We are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our enduring Lord." (Stanley, p 80)
  - c) This argument claims baptism is unnecessary because faith is the only condition. Often those we debate with regarding this are mixing and matching Arminianism with Calvinism. And as I said earlier in this outline, there have been 500 years for these doctrines to weaken in some, strengthen in others, get confused in still others. Just because I'm claiming this teaching against baptism doesn't of necessity flow from Calvinism doesn't mean someone who claims to be a Calvinist won't make it anyway.
  - d) However, the claim that faith is the only condition for salvation because it is mental versus baptism because it is an action of the body is technically not Calvinism, but Arminianism. In Calvinism, faith, as stated above, "greatly surpasses all the power of our nature" and is "a unique and precious gift of God." It is not a condition of salvation.
  - e) Of course, when we try to convince people that faith really is a powerful work even though a mental one (especially based on **John 6:27-29**), they will usually reply it is not our work but the work of God. Demonstrating it is not a condition at all. This demonstrates again how deficiently many we study with have actually thought through the logical conclusions of their argumentation.
6. Considering pt. 5 above, in Calvinism, "Faith Alone" does not mean faith is the only condition so Christians don't have to do any works.
- a) In fact, when we realize this, the concept of faith alone for Calvinism seems kind of odd. After all, faith actually doesn't stand out as different from any kind of obedience or good work Christians are supposed to do. We are left to wonder why Calvinists harp on about "Faith Alone."
  - b) "Observance of the Law, therefore, is not a work that our power can accomplish, but it is a work of a spiritual power. Through this spiritual power it is brought about that our hearts are cleansed from their corruption and are softened to obey unto righteousness. Now the function of the Law is for Christians quite different from what it may be without faith; for, when and where the Lord has engraved in our hearts the Law (which before was only charging us with weakness and transgression) is now a lamp to guide our feet, to the end that we may not deviate from the right path. It is now our wisdom through which we are formed, instructed, and encouraged to all integrity; it is our discipline which does not suffer us to be dissolute through evil licentiousness." (Instruction in Faith, p 42)
  - c) Thus it seems that in the logical progression of Calvinism, the idea of by Faith Alone isn't so much about faith as the only condition, but as a demonstration that salvation is about the promises of God through Jesus Christ instead of about our ability and personal righteousness.
  - d) "11. Faith  
"We confess that the entrance which we have to the great treasures and riches of the goodness of God that is vouchsafed to us is by faith; inasmuch as, in certain confidence and assurance of heart, we

- believe in the promises of the Gospel, and receive Jesus Christ as he is offered to us by the Father and described to us by the Word of God." (Theological Treatises, "The Geneva Confession," p 29)
7. This may seem like a long way to go to get to the point. However, having made the case above about what "Faith Alone" means when we consider the logical progression of Calvinistic theology, we shouldn't be surprised that even in the Calvinistic system, we could view baptism for the remission of sins as a necessary action, even requisite to becoming saved.
    - a) Granted, in the Calvinistic system, like faith, the action of getting baptized would be viewed as a gift from God, a fruit of election and not a cause of it. However, that need not make it any less for the forgiveness of sins as **Acts 2:38** demands.
    - b) In fact, though Calvin was a pedobaptist and not strictly an immerser, he demonstrates the necessity and requisite nature of baptism for the remission of sins in his writing and teaching.
  8. I believe an argument can be made that baptism could actually be seen as the 6<sup>th</sup> sola of the reformation.
    - a) The five solas are usually expressed as follows: We are saved by <sup>1</sup>grace alone, through <sup>2</sup>faith alone, in <sup>3</sup>Christ alone, for the <sup>4</sup>glory of God alone, upon the authority of <sup>5</sup>Scripture alone.
    - b) I am suggesting it doesn't contradict Calvinistic theology to add to that list by saying: at the point of <sup>6</sup>baptism alone.
  9. Read what Calvin says about baptism.
    - a) "Hence those who have thought that baptism is nothing else than the badge and mark by which we profess our religion before men, in the same way as soldiers attest their profession by bearing the insignia of their commander, having not attended to what was the principal thing in baptism; and this is, that we are to receive it in connection with the promise, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'" (Institutes, v II p 513)
    - b) "I know it is a common belief that forgiveness, which at our first regeneration we receive by baptism alone, is after baptism procured by means of penitence..." (Institutes, v II p 514)
      - (1) While Calvin speaks against procuring forgiveness after baptism by penitence, he does claim we initially receive forgiveness "by baptism alone." That is why I suggest the sixth sola.
    - c) "...Christ by baptism has made us partakers of his death, ingrafting [sic] us into it." (Institutes, v II p 515)
    - d) "Wherefore we obtain, and in a manner distinctly perceive, in the Father the cause, in the Son the matter, and in the Spirit the effect of our purification and regeneration. Thus first John baptized, and thus afterwards the apostles by the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, understanding by the term repentance, regeneration, and by remission of sins, ablution." (Institutes, v II p 516)
    - e) "We ought to hold that we are baptized for the mortification of our flesh, which is begun in baptism, is prosecuted every day, and will be finished when we depart from this life to go to the Lord." (Institutes, v II p 518-519)
    - f) "In baptism, the Lord promises forgiveness of sins: receive it, and be secure. I have no intention, however, to detract from the power of baptism. I would only add to the sign the substance and reality, inasmuch as God works by external means. But from this sacrament, as from all others, we gain nothing, unless in so far as we receive in faith. If faith is wanting, it will be an evidence of our ingratitude, by which we are proved guilty before God, for not believing the promise there given." (Institutes, v II p 521)
      - (1) By this we see an insight into why someone who believes salvation occurs at baptism, we receive forgiveness in baptism, and we are added to the church by baptism would still say salvation is by faith alone. Calvin sees, rightly so I believe, having water applied to our bodies does absolutely nothing unless it is by faith in the promise and powerful working of God.
      - (2) We are not saved through a ritual, we are saved through faith in God who commanded us to receive the promise in the ritual. Though, of course, we are not saved without the ritual, because faith demands we submit to the condition of the promise in which we have faith.
    - g) "God in baptism promises the remission of sins, and will undoubtedly perform what he has promised to all believers." (Institutes, p 522)
    - h) "M[inister]:...First, what is the meaning of Baptism?  
 "C[hild]: It has two parts. For there is remission of sins; and then spiritual regeneration is symbolized by it (Eph. 5:26; Rom. 6:4).  
 "M: What similarity has water to these things, that it represents them?"

"C: Forgiveness of sins is a kind of washing, by which our souls are cleansed from all their stains, just as bodily defilements are washed away by water.

"M: What about regeneration?

"C: Since the mortification of our nature is the beginning, and the end that we be new creatures, the metaphor of death is set before us in the pouring of water upon the head; but of new life in that we do not remain immersed under the water, but only for a moment descend into a sepulchre [sic], in order immediately to emerge.

"M: Do you regard the water as the washing of the soul?

"C: Not at all. For it is wrong to snatch this honour from the blood of Christ, which was poured out in order that, all our stains being wiped away, he might render us pure and unpolluted before God (I Peter 1:19; I John 1:7). And we perceive the fruit of this cleansing when the Holy Spirit sprinkles our conscience with that sacred blood. The seal of this we have in the sacrament.

"M: But do you attribute nothing more to the water than to be a mere symbol of ablution?

"C: I think it to be such a symbol that reality is attached to it. For God does not disappoint us when he promises us his gifts. Hence both pardon of sins and newness of life are certainly offered to us and received by us in Baptism." (Theological Treatises, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," p 133)

i) "M: Is it sufficient to receive both [sacraments] once in a lifetime?

"C: One Baptism suffices, and it may not be repeated. But the case of the Supper is different?

"M: What is the difference?

"C: By Baptism the Lord adopts us and brings us into his Church, so that we are thereafter held to be of his household. After he has inscribed us in the number of his own, he testifies by the Supper that he takes a perpetual interest in nourishing us." (Theological Treatises, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," p 138)

j) "In Baptism, the external minister baptizes with an external element, that is water, which is received bodily. The internal minister, the Holy Spirit, baptizes with the blood of the spotless Lamb, so that he that is baptized is endowed with the whole Christ, true God and true man (Gal. 3:27); thus it is not necessary to receive Christ by the organs of the body, in order that our souls be washed by his blood; but the secret and most potent operation of the Holy Spirit suffices." (Theological Treatises, "Summary of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments," p 173)

10. It seems clear to me that Calvin did not see a necessary and requisite baptism for the remission of sins as opposed to Calvinism. Again, he misunderstood baptism's place in the life of a child and he neglected that baptism is immersion. Certainly, he would say baptism was a gift from God, that it is not a work by which we meet the conditions of election, rather it is a fruit of election. However, he still saw it as necessary, required, and the point at which someone received forgiveness and the remission of sins. I wonder if we wouldn't do well to argue this point with Calvinists more than arguing about the conditional nature of election.

Conclusion:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). I want to preach this passage without reservation. I hope you do too. Teaching it does not mean teaching Calvinism. I don't want to preach Calvinism. I hope you don't either.

## Bibliography

Boice, James Montgomery, Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace: Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 2001.

Boice, James Montgomery and Philip Graham Ryken, The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 2002.

Calvin, John, The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius, ed A.N.S. Lane, tr G.I. Davies, Baker Book House, 1996.

- , Calvin: Theological Treatises, ed & tr J.K.S. Reid, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1954.
- , Concerning the Eternal Predestination of the Soul, tr. J.K.S. Reid, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1961.
- , Institutes of the Christian Religion, tr. Henry Beveridge, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993.—, Instruction in Faith (1537), tr Paul Fuhrmann, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1949.
- , Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines, ed & tr Benjamin Wirt Farley, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1982.
- The Canons of Dort, <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>, accessed September 26, 2016.
- Hunt, Dave and James White, Debating Calvinism {Five Points, Two Views}, Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, Oregon, 2004.
- McKeon, Richard ed., Basic Works of Aristotle, Random House Publishing, New York, 1941.
- Olin, John C ed., A Reformation Debate: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1966.
- Palmer, Edwin H., The Five Points of Calvinism, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1972.
- Ryrie, Charles C., So Great Salvation: What it Means to Believe in Jesus Christ, Victor Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1989.
- Schaff, Philip, The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds with Translations (Vol III), Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1966.
- Stanley, Charles, Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?, Oliver Nelson Books, Nashville, 1990.
- Steele, David N. and Curtis C. Thomas, The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, Documented, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1963.