

## Calvinism in John's Gospel

The Gospel of John was written for the main purpose of showing that Jesus was the Son of God and that by believing on his name a man may live. But in describing Jesus' actions and recording his words, John cannot avoid implications relative to other doctrines. The present question is: Did John touch upon the doctrines commonly called Calvinistic? If Calvinism is briefly summarized by TULIP, we can soon see that John not merely hints at Limited Atonement and the Perseverance of the Saints, but very definitely emphasizes them. Irresistible Grace is rather clearly implied; Total Depravity is less clearly implied; and while the subject matter of the Gospel affords little opportunity to discuss Unconditional Election, for this doctrine awaits a fuller exposition of Justification by Faith, nevertheless even Unconditional Election is not passed over in silence. All five doctrines are based on the Sovereignty of God, and the Gospel teaches the Sovereignty of God without always making a definite mention of any one of the five.

Let us therefore take up TULIP in the order of the letters.

The doctrine of Total Depravity holds that sin has vitiated all parts of the human constitution. It does not mean that any man is as bad as he could imaginably be; but it means that no word, thought, or deed escapes the baleful influence of sin. The doctrine of Total Depravity goes farther than the bare notion that men commit evil acts. If strictly defined, it may not go so far as the idea of the immediate imputation of Adam's sin and his natural posterity's inheritance of a depraved nature. To be sure, the Bible teaches these things; and it is sometimes difficult to say precisely where one doctrine merges into another; but if very strictly circumscribed, Total Depravity means that all aspects of human nature have been affected by sin. Man in his totality is sinful. No part of him remains righteous.

Now obviously John's Gospel emphasizes the fact of sin. John 1:29 says, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Then come the sins of the money changers in the temple, the sins of the woman of Samaria, the sins of the Pharisees, and of Judas, and of the disciples too. None of these quite say that every thought, every word, and every deed of every man is sinful.

Of course John did not have to say this, for, first, it was not essential to his purpose, and, second, the Old Testament had already said it quite clearly. In fact, Paul's most explicit passage on total depravity is mainly a series of quotations from the Psalms.

Nevertheless John says or implies more than the mere fact that some men sometimes do what is wrong. Let us quickly run through the Gospel from beginning to end.

John 1:5

John 1:10-11

John 3:3, 5, 6

“Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Since a person is born as a whole person, not just  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$ , a new birth must refer to the whole person too. Therefore the old “whole person” was sinful.

3:5 “Unless a man be born of water and spirit ...”

3:6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.”

This again reflects on the difference between the two births.

John 3:3, 5, 6. The verses all indicate that of the first birth, a man is born in sin. Men do not first become sinners in later life. [Arminians and some Baptists teach that children are innocent.]

3:19 “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” [Love = ἀγαπάω] The reference to love shows how deep seated their evil was.

6:44 “No one can come to me, unless the Father ... draw him.”

A clear statement of inability. The coming is mental, not physical. It is a desire for God.

Therefore a man cannot even desire to come to God because desire is the coming.

6:65 “No one can come to me, unless it [the coming] be given to him of the Father.”

7:19 “Not one of you keeps the Law.”

A statement of sin; although it refers only to “you” and is not universal in extent or profundity.

8:44 “You are of your father the devil...”

This shows how deep their evil is; although it refers only to these Jews.

12:38ff. Isaiah’s prophecies seem to be universal in extent, although of course Isaiah preached only to the Jews. However, to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed is more clearly universal than the reference to Isaiah’s “report.”

Unconditional Election. We are elected of pure grace and not on the basis of foreseen merit, or faith. Again this is clearer in the Epistles – not of works, no boasting, even faith is a pure gift. Cf. 4:10. If you had known God’s free gift.

5:21. The Son gives life to whoever he pleases.

15:16. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

#### Limited Atonement.

Limited Atonement is the most unpopular of Calvinistic doctrines. Perseverance of the Saints is the most popular and is most easily accepted by some confused Arminians. Now, it is noteworthy that of all five letters, TULIP, L and P have the greatest emphasis in John. Not only emphasis separately, but they are intertwined, so that Arminians who accept P and reject L are properly called confused. This is as it should be, for the five doctrines are part of one logical system. Scripture is not a disordered agglomeration of unrelated ideas. They all fit together.

First, (6:37) The Father has given a people to Christ. This people is not the entire human race. One commentator says παν ὁ is neuter, therefore the entire race, of whom some resist, but he who comes ὁ ἐρχόμενον is masculine. [Therefore not limited]

The grammar of the comment is correct – παν refers to the people en masse and ὁ ἐρχόμενον individually. But though en masse it is not the human race, but all of the mass come, e.g. the Pharisees did not come.

The same commentator has little to say on the subject when he comes to 17:6 – for here it is clear that the men whom the Father gave to Christ were not all the world.

Still clearer is 17:9 – where the world and these men are contrasted.

And 17:24 shows again that those whom the Father gave Christ will be with him and behold his glory.

Obviously this does not include the Pharisees. In fact, is not the immediate reason for this verse (6:37) the need of stating that the Pharisees were unbelievers = 6:36.

They had said (6:34) Lord, give us this bread. And alone this might be taken as evidence of their acceptance of Christ. But either they were ignorant or insincere.

In the next place, those whom the Father gave Christ, will come.

This identifies the individuals. Anyone who as a matter of fact comes to Christ is one whom the Father gave him. We do not know who these individuals are before they come. A Calvinist was accused of inconsistency for preaching to all people when only the elect would be saved; he replied, if you will put a check mark on the elect, I will preach only to them.

And third, this verse should discourage no one because it teaches Christ will not reject anyone who comes.

Insincere (!) sinners excuse themselves on the ground that they are not elect. But no one can know this. Anyone who comes sincerely is elect, and will not be cast out.

6:38, 39. Note how the Limited Atonement is connected with Perseverance of the Saints. Jesus will surely receive all who come because he came down from heaven for that purpose – it is the Father's will that none [of the elect] be lost.

N.B. Those given by the Father (39) and those who see and believe (40) are the same people.

41, 42. Again show that the Jews or Pharisees are not included.

44. The distinction is made still clearer: 37 said, all the Father gave will come. Here, 44, no one can come except the Father draw him.

Note the inability of the sinner. Only God initiates salvation. If men were left to themselves, no one would come. Only God can make a man willing to come. The will, dead in sin, hates God and cannot please him (Romans 8:8).

6:64. Jesus had known from the beginning.

6:70. Which would betray him.

10:11. The shepherd lays down his life for the sheep – not for the wolves.

Question: When Christ died on the cross, did he intend to save the wicked people of Sodom? He did intend to atone for Abraham and Moses.

### Irresistible Grace

Again this is taught by implication – more definitive teaching in the Epistles – but cf. 1:13 begotten ... not of men but of God.

3:3 and all references to the new birth.

A child cannot resist being born. God's begetting is irresistible.

5:21 The Son quickened whom he will, like raising the dead, cf. 5:25. The dead cannot resist.

Besides, if God is really Almighty, who can resist God's will?

6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come – and 6:45.

God guarantees the results.

47, 50, 51 again teach Perseverance of the Saints. [For the present purpose, we omit discussion of eating Christ's flesh and its relation to the Lord's Supper.]

65, 66. The complex of ideas was too much for them. Christ's claims, eating his flesh, and Limited Atonement, or at least exclusion of Jews, made many reject Christ.

Perhaps they were not offended only or even chiefly because of Limited Atonement, but their rejection illustrates Limited Atonement to the extent that even one of the disciples is a devil = 70-71.

In talking with Arminians and others not instructed in the Word, there is one question that forces [unwilling] assent to Limited Atonement.

When Christ suffered on the cross, whom did he intend to save?

The Pharisees? The sinners destroyed by the flood? Those burned up in Sodom? Or, his own?

To avoid Limited Atonement the reply would have to be: he did not intend to save anyone, but just to make salvation possible – to give people a chance.

But this is not his expressed intention. He came to save!

Also John 10:14. The sheep know Christ, and he knows them. Christ dies for the sheep i.e. for the people whom God gave him: it is the same group.

10:26. Ye are not of my sheep: therefore Christ did not lay down his life for them.

10:27-29. N.B. Perseverance of the Saints and Limited Atonement are closely connected. We cannot consistently accept P and reject L.

Perseverance of the Saints is the most popular and widely received of the five points. Arminians are hard pressed to defend the opposite.

3:15. whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.

3:16. ditto.

3:36. hath everlasting life.

All such references to everlasting life are inconsistent with the notion that a person can have life and then lose it – a life that is or can be lost is not everlasting.

4:14 Whosoever drinketh of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst.

Never: emphatic - οὐ μὴ ... εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

But the water I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

N.B. Christ does not offer a chance of salvation; he offers salvation. Those who believe receive what he offers i.e. salvation = eternal life.

6:35 [After feeding the 5,000] He that cometh to me shall never οὐ μὴ hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never οὐ μὴ ... πώποτε thirst.

6:39 of all that he hath given me, I should lose nothing ...

6:40 Everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day.

6:44 repeated.

6:51 he shall live forever.

6:54 cf. 40 and 44

10:28 I give unto them eternal life.

They shall never perish οὐ μὴ ... εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand.

10:29. No one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

This is all so explicit that the Arminians should hide their heads in shame.

Other Calvinisms in John indicating Foreordination.

6:64, 65. Judas had been chosen for his evil task.

7:6, 30; 8:20; 13:1. His time was not yet come. God had a plan and the Jews could not disrupt that plan.

9:3 The man “was born blind in order that God's mercy might be openly shown in him” [= Weymouth]

God's plan – his unfortunate malady was not an accident.

11:4 and 42. Lazarus sickened and died to demonstrate the glory of God.

12:38, 39; 13:18; 15:25; 19:36 – prophecy shows that the events were fixed in God's eternal counsel.

19:11 Pilate's power comes from God.

### Calvinistic Implications in John

10:16 I have other sheep and I must lead them – how else than by an eternal plan?

10:17-18 the cross goes according to plan.

Voluntary/authority or power/ therefore an eternal plan.

10:28 etc. perseverance

If God had created them sheep They would have believed.