

## CALVINISM IS UNSCRIPTURAL

For many people, an article purporting to show that *Calvinism is Unscriptural* should have appeared at or near the beginning of this series not the end. For them, it's an open-and-shut case. John 3:16 alone is enough to render Calvinism a heretical aberration not worth further discussion. However, as I argued in the introductory piece, such an approach will not do because Calvinists have a different worldview – a different lens – through which they see and interpret the scriptural evidence. Thus, no matter which verses are marshalled against them, the glasses through which they look determine what they see. This is the reason the first several articles dealt with logical and philosophical consistency. Only after the Calvinist scheme has been shown to be internally inconsistent and even self-contradictory, do we have grounds for rejecting the Calvinist worldview and a warrant for evaluating the biblical evidence from a different perspective. That task having been accomplished, it will be the purpose of this article to demonstrate that, in fact, the Calvinist position is blatantly unscriptural. Not only does it overlook scores of passages which assume libertarian freedom, or that teach a universal atonement and God's concern for the lost generally, Calvinism entails the explicit denial of foundational precepts taught in the Torah and by Jesus Himself.

### UNLESS GOD CANNOT BE TRUSTED, THE SCRIPTURES TEACH LIBERTARIAN FREE WILL:

On the basis of a few proof texts, Calvinists like to trumpet loudly that they merely affirm what the Bible teaches and that those who disagree are more interested in exalting the freedom of man than the glory and sovereignty of God.<sup>1</sup> It's a powerful appeal. After all, what true Christian doesn't want to take the Bible's side and glorify the Creator over the creature? But is the appeal true? I think not. From cover to cover, for example, the Bible is replete with instances of God pleading with sinners to repent lest they die or otherwise face judgment. Consider as a case in point, Jeremiah 7:1-29. "In this passage, God calls his people to repentance. God enumerates the sins of his people and reminds them that while they were doing such things, he spoke to them again and again (7:13). But instead of repenting, they persist in idolatry and other self-destructive behavior. God promises to punish them for their sin, but he again reiterates that he repeatedly sent his prophets to them to urge them to obedience (7:20-26)."<sup>2</sup> References like this could be multiplied *ad nauseam*.<sup>3</sup> Certainly far more calls for repentance exist than do so-called Calvinist proof texts.<sup>4</sup> The relevant point, however, is that such passages assume a particular type of freedom, namely, libertarian freedom. It seems obvious that God sincerely wanted His people to repent of their sinful ways. The fact that He repeatedly warned them through His prophets and urged them to return to Him implies that they were, in fact, capable of doing so. His terrifying threats of judgment for their continued rebellion make no sense unless they could have repented and yet freely chose to rebel instead. Calvinists, however, have to dismiss the obvious implication of such verses arguing that although on the surface it looks as though God's desire was for the people to repent, at the deepest level – in His secret will – God never intended for Jeremiah's audience to respond. "In other words, *the true intentions of God cannot be discerned from his words [emphasis original]*."<sup>5</sup> Calvinism forces us to choose between a God whose real will we cannot know, and genuine libertarian freedom. I choose the latter.

### UNLESS GOD CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD, HIS LOVE AND ATONEMENT EXTEND TO ALL:

In the previous article, I attempted to show that Calvinism is immoral because it teaches that despite having the ability to do so, God has chosen not to save all men precisely because He does not love all men – does not want them saved. Such a position also flies in the face of those Scriptures which assure us that He is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*," – that He "*will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*," – or that He has "*no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*" (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; Ezekiel 18:32). As 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian Herman Venema so eloquently stated,

"From these passages we infer that there is a general will or purpose of God held forth in the gospel by which he has linked together faith and salvation without excluding any man, and declares that it is agreeable to him that all should believe and live. If this be denied then it follows that he absolutely willed that some should perish and that, according to his good pleasure, the proposition "he that believes shall be saved" should not apply to them. What becomes, in this case, of his universal love?"<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, there are at least a dozen passages that distinctly avow the universal provision for sin through Christ.<sup>7</sup> Many more affirm that the opportunity to receive Christ's atonement and be saved has been extended to all.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there are a multitude of texts that ascribe guilt to sinners who refuse the gospel invitation.<sup>9</sup> Matthew 23:37 is particularly clear, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" Jesus would; Jerusalem would not. Hence the judgment that befell them was deserved. On top of this, there are several texts which directly affirm that Christ died for some who will ultimately perish eternally.<sup>10</sup> In light of the overwhelming evidence one might be forgiven for asking, "Who it is that has Scripture on their side?"

<sup>1</sup> Cf. article by John Piper at <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism>

<sup>2</sup> Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 27:13; Ezekiel 18:31, 33:11; Joel 2:12; Zechariah 1:4, Matthew 23:37, etc.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. John 6:65; Romans 8:29-30 9:13, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Walls and Dongell, 57.

<sup>6</sup> David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic 2016), 267.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John 1:29; 3:16; 6:51; 12:47; Romans 5:9, 18-21; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 2:6, 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; and 1 John 2:2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Timothy 2:4; and Revelation 22:17.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 13:15-17; Matthew 23:37; Luke 14:17-24; John 3:19; Acts 7:51, 13:46; Hebrews 2:3, and 10:28-29.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hebrews 10:29; and 2 Peter 2:1.

## UNLESS GOD CAN VIOLATE HIS OWN CHARACTER, HE MUST ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE LOST

The preceding two paragraphs offer valid criticisms of the Calvinist position, but could anything truly prove that such a position *entails* the denial of God's foundational laws as suggested above? That seems a high bar indeed; yet, as I will show, Calvinism requires us to believe that God acts in ways that violate His law – the law that reveals His basic character.

The Ten Commandments are the very heart of God's law. For this reason, it is not surprising that their first table emphasizes absolute love for Him. What is striking, however, is the emphasis placed upon the wellbeing of the “neighbor.” In fact, according to Rolf and Karl Jacobson “it is not too strong to say that the main point of the Ten Commandments is God's concern for the welfare of the neighbor.”<sup>11</sup> Take the ninth commandment as an example. This is not simply a general prohibition of lying. Rather, it is phrased in such a way as to engender concern for others. Its primary thrust is “don't hurt your neighbor with your words.”<sup>12</sup> As you would expect, this concern for the “neighbor” overflows into other focal texts of the Mosaic Law such as the Holiness code of Leviticus 17-26. Indeed, in the most solemn portion of that code, Leviticus 19, it plays the key role. The theme of that great chapter, “well known to most Christians thanks to its citation by Peter, is ‘*Be ye holy; for I am holy*’ (1 Peter 1:16). Accordingly, the chapter provides a ‘rapid panoramic tour’ of what it means to be holy.”<sup>13</sup> Holiness, of course, is the essential nature of God.<sup>14</sup> It is God's very character to be holy. However, “since God had chosen Israel, His character was to be reflected in their lives” as well.<sup>15</sup> This was precisely what God had in mind in v. 18 when He said, “*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.*” The closing phrase, “*I am the LORD*” is crucial. It roots the command to love one's neighbor in God's own divine character. Picking up on these ideas, Jesus explained that the first commandment was to “*love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*” (Matthew 22:37). He then added that the second command was like it: “*love thy neighbour as thyself*” (22:39). “These are the two greatest commandments, for they summarize the whole law. One can thus say that the way to become holy is to keep the Commandments, but the way to keep the Commandments is by loving God and loving [our neighbor].”<sup>16</sup> From these truths we may derive the following premises:

- 1 – Holiness is the essential nature of God.
- 2 – Holiness demands loving one's neighbor as one's self.
- 3 – Therefore, to be consistent with His own character, God must love His neighbor as Himself.

It seems clear that to love one's neighbor as one's self requires seeking their salvation, yea even to the point of laying down one's own life to secure it (Romans 5:8; John 15:13). Thus,

- 4 – To love His neighbors as Himself, God must attempt to save them from their sins.

Calvinists do not hesitate to affirm this. But, as we have seen, they have an escape by denying that God loves the non-elect. But, for this escape to work, it must be the case that God does not reckon the non-elect among His neighbors – that He need not act “neighborly” toward them. Jesus, however, eviscerated that option in His famous parable of “The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).” When the lawyer tried to justify his own lack of love for others with the question, “*And who is my neighbour?*” Jesus responded that one's “neighbor” is anyone he or she encounters in need, and “love” is putting oneself out in the effort to meet those needs.<sup>17</sup> Nothing less can satisfy the requirements of love. Why? Because nothing less can reflect the holy character of God. Given that the so-called non-elect are in need, Calvinism finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. Either,

- 5 - God can help them and chooses not to do so (in violation of His own revealed character), or
- 6 – God does love and is attempting to save all men (making Calvinism an unscriptural misrepresentation of His nature).<sup>18</sup>

For me the choice is clear. “*God...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

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<sup>11</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson and Karl N. Jacobson, *The Old Testament and the Neighbor* (Word & World Vol. 37, 1 Winter 2017), 17

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Derek Tidball, *Discovering Leviticus* (Leicester, England: Crossway, 1996), 150.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Kaiser, “The Book of Leviticus,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Volume 1*, ed. L. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 985-1191; 1131.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobson and Jacobson, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD, A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 351.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>18</sup> There are other options, which Calvinists pursue such as the notion that God's zeal for His glory overrides His genuine love for the lost. This possibility has been refuted, however, in a previous article.