

Free or Pre, A Study in Contrast

Considering Free Will and Predestination

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the horn and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away for his wrongdoing; but I will require his blood from the watchman's hand. Ezek. 33:6 nasb

Socially Handicapped

Since the early 1960's I have pursued Christian faith that has a purpose and lifestyle that expresses the Father's heart even if it separates us from the world.

This pursuit was amplified as God opened [Col. 1:27](#) and [II Cor. 3:18](#) to me, and they were too good to keep to myself.

Accompanying this has been an alertness to intruders who hinder it, with a readiness to identify and address them. I will probably bear that handicap until I die.

Regretfully . .

FOR HIS GLORY has been, by and large, a positive document and I wish I could conclude on that note. I can't though if I want a good conscience before God.

Ignorance, unbelief, pride and love for the world are what typically hinder our pursuing the Kingdom Life that I have portrayed, but there's more. There is an increasingly popular belief system out there that can handicap us.

This supplement is not a theological treatise as much as a look at how Calvinism can play out in life. In addition to my perspective from many years, I have observed it up close for eight years as leaders in an Anabaptist-Mennonite church attempted to abandon its historic beliefs and convert it to Calvinism.

It would surprise many of their trusting but uninformed members to learn that they are not an Anabaptist-Mennonite church, as one pastor boldly told me. If it can happen there, it can happen anywhere.

My concern is not to exalt Anabaptism or to bash Neo-Calvinists. It is that we must become Jesus' [Mt. 16:18](#) Church, and we must be aware of hindrances to that.

Some Caveats

Each theological stream in the Church is bundled. Certain beliefs go together, and if we believe "this," we will likely believe "that." We call that a "belief system."

Every belief system has scriptures that are awkward to explain considering the way we understand others. Theologians then craft a belief system to navigate that as well as possible. No belief system is complete, and each can learn from others.

Theology is important, as it shapes spirituality (how we experience God), which shapes our personal life and the culture of our life together.

Calvinism is generally a secondary issue, and I feel strongly about not letting secondary issues divide the Church. However, it is not just a slightly different approach to the scriptures - it presents a significantly different view of God, man, and the God-man relationship and creates a very different church culture.

It was never an issue for me to serve alongside Calvinists over the years, because of our shared commitment to a task. Nevertheless, there is a predictable temptation toward pride and superiority in being among the "elect." Neo-Calvinists are more inclined to make an issue of their beliefs and to try to "convert" others to them, as in the church I have observed.

This religion and its culture is making inroads into the Anabaptist community. I suspect that many don't understand its true nature, and we must be informed.

I accept Calvinists as my fellow believers but strenuously object to an attempt to "convert" an Anabaptist church.

Looking Back, and Ahead

For most of my adult life I have felt the need for revival in the Church. I have sensed that we are in a different "Day" on God's calendar.

Many saints can see that the present church isn't what Jesus has in mind and are hungry for something more. Recognizing ones' need can make us vulnerable to unbiblical solutions.

I say boldly that the robust, daring, dynamic, spiritual vitality of the early Church and of the Anabaptists, and of life in the Kingdom of God that FOR HIS GLORY portrays, can only come through a spirituality that is based on a culture of free will that leads to heart intimacy with Jesus.

Anabaptism's faith culture enhances that, while Calvinism's dulls it.

Radical (normal) Christian faith entails a lifestyle of countless, costly choices as we enter deeply into the Kingdom of God, starting with the narrow gate of [Matt. 7:13-14](#) and including the cross of [Lk. 9:23-26](#).

Jesus' words often call us to costly choices in following Him, and we must live in a consciousness of that as long as Satan is tempting us to do otherwise.

The spiritual duet of [II Cor. 6:18-7:1](#) can only follow a free will mindset and a culture of ongoing choices and repentance as described in [II Cor. 6:14-7:1](#).

None of that "earns" us anything with God, but it all leads to the increasingly fulfilling heart intimacy with Him that we were created for.

This is all irrelevant if we are satisfied with the institutional churches' present lethargic state or are at ease in the comfort of being among Calvinism's "Elect."

Calvinism

Calvinism is a rapidly growing movement in America today led by John Piper, Tim Keller, Mark Driscoll and others.

It embraces the five TULIP points of historic Calvinism which, incidentally, deviate from most of Christendom. It may be "gentler and kinder" than the old Calvinism, but it remains the most "evangelistic" of all Protestant persuasions in attempting to convert other Christians to its distinctive beliefs.

Calvinism especially appeals to sincere Christ-seekers and to young people. Its dogmatism gives them something to confidently believe in and a cause to stand for as compared to much of the church.

There is apparently something potentially mesmerizing about Calvinism. And something sensual in its aura of superiority that titillates the part of our soul that hungers for meaning and purpose.

Calvinism's TULIP

Calvinism can be summarized by the acronym TULIP.

- 1 - Total depravity
- 2 - Unconditional election, predestination
- 3 - Limited atonement
- 4 - Irrresistible grace
- 5 - Perseverance of the saints (eternal security, or "once saved, always saved")

Calvinists will typically embrace 1, 2 and 5, and a "Five-Point Calvinist" all five. A "Four-Point Calvinist" will likely reject #3, and a "Three-Pointer" will also reject #4. It's complicated.

Let's take a brief look at Calvinism's five points. Bear in mind that they are all at odds with Protestantism in general, and that they are not obvious in scripture. One must construct a belief system to support them.

For an excellent resource, please see David Servant's article, "Calvinism's Five Points Considered" at:

www.davidservant.com/articles/calvinism/

1 - Total Depravity

Calvinism's "Total Depravity" underlies their belief system and leads to their predestination theory.

By "total depravity" they mean that man is so dead that he cannot hear God's Spirit. My favorite Calvinist, whom I love dearly, describes man as "road-kill dead."

In that case, "election" is God's only option if He wants to have humans in heaven with Him through eternity.

Christians typically reject that morbid view of man and God, believing that there is something of God's Spirit in every man that has the capacity to respond to Him.

Certainly, there is no "good" in man that qualifies him for eternal life, but please consider that "*nekros*" ([Strong's G3498](#)), the Greek word for "dead" in [Eph. 2:5](#) and [Col. 2:13](#), is used both literally and metaphorically. Here it is metaphorical and speaks of "destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God; destitute of power." (Strong's, edited)

2 - Unconditional Election

Yes, scripture *does* include words like "The elect," "predestined" and so forth. Some of them *are* challenging to sort out and we can't ignore them.

The issue is whether God, before the world was made, decided who would be saved and who would not, or whether the elect are those whom He foreknew would choose Him and thus receive eternal life.

Calvinism's belief is contrary to many scriptures that come to mind about "whosoever will," and it violates God's original design for man.

God's sovereignty is demonstrated in His love for sinners, like Saul/Paul. And me. And you.

And it is preserved in that He has the last word about everything, and in the end, "every knee will bow before Him" as in [Rom. 14:11-12](#). Now THAT is sovereignty! (From. [Phil. 2:10-11](#)) And how about [Rev. 19:11-19](#)?

Calvinists are not united on the destiny of infant/child deaths, including stillborns and miscarriages, and at least some believe that those who were not among the "elect" are damned.

3 - Limited atonement

Calvinism's "Limited Atonement" asserts that Jesus's death only atoned for the sins of the elect.

We believe that to contradict the "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" of [I John 2:2](#), and the "whoever" of [John 3:16](#), [Rom 10:13](#) and elsewhere.

4 - Irresistible Grace

Calvinism says that if God says, "You are in," you cannot resist Him. This matches their "predestination" which says that if He says "You are out" you are condemned to hell by God with no hope - because that's what He decided for you.

It violates any sense of free will and contradicts our observations of what normally takes place in the heart of man.

5 - Perseverance of the Saints

More commonly known as "eternal security" or "once saved, always saved," Calvinists believe that it is not possible for a Christian to turn from faith.

Many Christians struggle with the assurance of salvation because they are so aware of their failures and don't understand the Biblical meaning of "grace" and of how God looks upon those who are "in Christ." When they look at their failures and wonder how God could accept them, they become vulnerable to Calvinism's "eternal security."

I am extremely secure in Christ, but various scriptures, written to Christians, do present the need for us to be alert to falling away. Consider [Col. 1:21-23](#) and [Heb. 2:1-3](#). And [Heb. 3:12-15](#), [Heb. 10:26-27](#), [Heb. 12:25](#), [II Peter 2:20-22](#) and more.

Calvinists like to say that if someone falls away, they were never really saved, but the word “knowledge” in both [Heb. 10:26](#) and [II Peter 2:20](#) is [Strong’s 1922, epignósis](#), which speaks of “knowledge gained through first-hand relationship.”

God will not let His child go easily. He warns them, woos them, and extends forgiveness and restoration as they walk away, but ultimately, because He gave us free will, they can go.

The Process

The strategy used in imposing this belief system and its culture upon the congregation I observed; without their knowledge; in disregard for the Priesthood of Believers and dismissive of the several informed questioners from within the Body who approached them privately; together with its already negative effect, confirms how contrary it is the churches’ historic and Biblical beliefs and culture. The process is as telling as the results.

The Shift

There are observable shifts as a local body transitions into Calvinism.

The Anabaptist vision of the Church as a spiritual body; led by the Spirit of God; under the rule of Jesus; emphasizing inner transformation of the heart; with individual membership in the Kingdom of God; and living and serving together for His purposes as a priesthood of believers in community; in a lifestyle that separates one from the world - is supplanted by a very different model.

Calvinism, as I have seen it applied locally, is more “of man,” centering around head knowledge than the spiritual man of the heart. Jesus’ words in [John 5:39-40](#) shout warning.

Its leaders can serve in a top-down manner contrary to [Matt. 20:24-28](#), as in the local case.

“Leadership” takes on more of a management flavor instead of the

shepherding of [I Peter 5:2-3](#), thus shaping their response to those in need.

It leads to an emphasis on accountability to men more than the saints’ sense of accountability to Jesus by His Spirit.

There is an obvious shift toward ones’ spiritual identity and membership being in the local church institution, rather than in the Kingdom of God and the Mt. 16:18 Church as the spiritual Body of Christ. It was once preached there that one is baptized into the local church.

Supposed expository preaching can now cover books of the Bible that are laced with repentance themes, and Jesus’ Letters to the Seven Churches - and let the hearers untouched. Their altars are abandoned.

THIS, is Calvinism in action as it moves into an Anabaptist-Mennonite church.

Conclusion

I say confidently that while Calvinism offers a seemingly satisfying form of religion, it is unable to lead to the kind of heart relationship with God that equips us to enter deeply into the life of the Kingdom of God that glorifies Him and equips us to serve Him in bringing others into that Life.

Our Anabaptist, free-will theology leads to a discipleship culture of following Jesus from a surrendered and transformed heart in a way that influences all of life. That is the core of “Anabaptist/Mennonite” even if we don’t do it well nowadays – but we can.

Ken Stoltzfus, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636

ken@flyinghigher.net

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