

ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAFE?
HISTORIC CALVINISM

INTRO: I felt that, having spoken at funeral the other day, I should make some theological explanation for my personal views. Certainly there was not time in the twenty minutes I was given to speak at the funeral to make a theological defence for what I shared.

Throughout Church history believers have been divided over the issue of the security of the believer in Christ. Can a person, once he becomes a Christian lose his salvation?

Several positions have been put forth but only two are actual possibilities. 1. Yes a person can lose his salvation and 2. No a person cannot lose his salvation.

I do not profess to know all there is to know about these two views and I may have missed important points. If you might shed further light on this subject to me please feel free to point out things I may not yet have considered. However, I have spent many hundreds of hours studying both positions and meditated as many hours on this topic. I have given hundreds of hours to studying the original languages of the Bible so that I could study this and other questions in light of the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible. Further, I have given much time to studying the doctrine of salvation and these studies have shed further light on the topic for me. I fully realize that from not too long after the Lord ascended to heaven this became a doctrinal question for the Church and that it will remain to be such until the day Jesus comes.

I must tell you that that we cannot have it both ways. Either one or the other position is right and the other is wrong or both are wrong. Further, I believe it is important to understand the issues involved if you want to come to a strong personal conviction about this issue. Wherever I go this question comes up again and again.

Let me further explain that it is important that this doctrine is kept in its proper theological place. It might help you if I explain this by way of an overhead so you can visualize what I am about to say.

Top Level Doctrine

Non-negotiable Doctrines:

- God is the Creator of all things
- Jesus is God
- Jesus is virgin born
- The Holy Spirit is God
- etc...

Acceptance of these major doctrines determines whether you or your church is an Evangelical Church. If you doubt these top level doctrines your salvation is in question.

Second Level Doctrine

Speaking in tongues: Is it languages or ecstatic utterances?
The woman's head covering.
Baptism by immersion or pouring or sprinkling.
Can a person lose his salvation.
Etc....

If the first level doctrines determine if you are a Christian the second level doctrines determine more what denomination one belongs to.

Third Level Doctrines

There are literally hundreds of thousands of minor various positions one can take on issues of little consequence. Good Christian people within the same denomination will disagree on these issues but they are of little consequence if they are handled in Christian maturity.

The point of showing you this chart is so that you will not treat people who differ with you on the eternal security question as though they are non-Christians. Good Christians stand on both sides. The position you take on this doctrine does not determine your eternal destiny. However, I would add that that does not mean they are not important doctrines. They are for they will affect you greatly. I always seek to be accurate down to the smallest points.

Many, many times I am asked about the topic of eternal security. I will not finish this topic today. I will continue this topic in the Tompkins church. If you would like to have the tapes when this series is completed you may sign up in the back of the church after the message today. Place your name and box number on the sheet and we will make sure you get a copy of these messages.

I plan in these messages to give you the major points of this doctrine, then my personal view of what I believe the Bible teaches and then I want to answer the major arguments of the opposing view.

I am not seeking to cover all the points in this great debate. If you are interested in a more thorough study of this topic let me recommend to you Allen P. F. Sell's book, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation*.

I. MAJOR POINTS TO BE CONSIDERED

I am not familiar with the history of this doctrine before the reformation, except to know that the debate existed already. However, during the reformation a great theologian arose by the name of John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin, who was greatly influenced by those before him, put into writing his views on this great topic and many other doctrines. Efforts have been made to capsulize the teachings of John Calvin and I believe it has been best done by the teaching called the TULIP. Each letter stands for a major component of John Calvin's teaching. I want to look at each letter and then share the inadequacy of that teaching.

James Arminias, who lived from 1560-1609, opposed Calvin's teaching in every point. I am going to present to you Calvin's teaching but rather than give you James Arminius' teaching I want to point out where Calvin went wrong according to my own studies of the Scripture. I did not learn my views from James Arminius nor do I agree with him in every point. In general though, I believe James Arminius' teaching was correct on this doctrine.

I. **T**otal Depravity

If you should study the great doctrine of salvation a term you would need to become familiar with is the term *total depravity*. This term speaks of man's condition after the fall. By total depravity John Calvin meant that man became so low, so depraved of all good qualities that he is referred to in Scripture as *dead in sins*. [Almost all theologians (one who studies Bible doctrine) now accept the term total depravity but they do not necessarily mean what John Calvin meant. So in discussing this with others you must first ask what they mean by total depravity.] What John Calvin meant is that man is dead in sins, totally cut off from God and he is so depraved that he cannot

make a decision for Christ. If you speak to your neighbor about the Lord that neighbor cannot believe in Christ because he is totally depraved.

So you will ask, "How then can my neighbor be saved?" The answer is this, "If he was not elected by God in eternity past he cannot accept Christ. If he was elected by God in eternity past then God will give him the gift of faith. Once God gives him the gift of faith he is given divine life before he personally accepts Christ but since he is given this divine life he now will accept Christ.

That, to the best of my understanding, is the teaching of total depravity according to John Calvin. I must tell you that I find no support in all the Bible for that teaching. The Bible says in no uncertain terms, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Calvinism says you cannot choose because you are dead in sins.

Calvinism will then use verses like John 6:44 to prove their point. However, no Arminian ought to deny that the first step in salvation is God's. However, such verses should be taught in light of the rest of Scripture and surely John 12:32 must be taken into consideration.

I recently taught a course in a Bible School and students asked me about this aspect: Can man choose? They pointed out the Calvinistic position of the principle. I said, "Your principle is a great teacher of the Word. I have great respect for him. But I want you to know that though he is a Calvinist, when he preaches he becomes a good Arminian. You see he invites people to come to Christ so in this he still does right."

What then is the Biblical answer to the position that people cannot respond to the Gospel until God gives them the gift of faith? The answer is this: Saving faith is never taught as a gift in the Bible. A list of verses is given to prove that faith is a gift. I want to tell you I do not know of a single verse where saving faith is taught as a gift. There is a gift of faith but it is not for unbelievers but for believers.

Let me give you an example: 1 Cor. 12:9 (Context is spiritual gifts for believers).

There are other verses given but they either speak of faith as a gift for the believer or of the Christian faith. Let me repeat, I do not know of a single verse that clearly teaches

saving faith is a gift rather it is a responsibility to be exercised.

II. Unconditional Election

Many students of Calvinism feel that central to his view is his teaching on predestination. I feel that, central to both Calvinism and Arminianism is not predestination but election. How one views election is most crucial in this whole debate.

Unconditional election according to Calvinism is this: Election is that act of God by which He in His sovereign pleasure chose some to be recipients of His special grace and they will believe. Others He chose to reprobation and they will refuse to believe and thus be eternally lost. In plain words, God chose some to salvation apart from their will to believe and he chose most to damnation entirely apart from any personal choice.

This view of election is election based on God's predetermined choice. I cannot here give all the arguments for and against this view. If you are interested in further study in this you might ask for our Wednesday night Bible study notes on this topic.

Well, what does the Bible say about election?

It tells us first of all that many are called and few are chosen. Few are elected. Why is that? We will look at that shortly (Matt. 22:14).

Second, the Bible tells us in Eph. 1:4 that God chose His people before the foundation of the world.

Must we conclude that because God chose His elect, that is Christians, before the foundation of the world man therefore plays no part in election? Not at all. The Calvinistic view of election is based on predeterminism. The Bible, however, never teaches election as based on predeterminism. Election according to the Bible is based on foreknowledge. God, in eternity past, chose that He wanted in His kingdom only those people who would choose Him of their own free will. Since He knows all things in advance, (He is omniscient) knew who would choose Him and those are the ones He chose for His kingdom.

In teaching this doctrine to Bible school students I ask them how they would like it if they could buy themselves a wife or husband. This wife or husband would do whatever they wanted him

or her to do. All you had to do was pay them money. So much for carrying out the garbage, so much for lemon pie etc... They are always shocked at such a suggestion. Nobody wants to buy a husband or wife. We want a mate that will love us for what we are not for what we will give. So it is with God. He has chosen those to be His children who will choose Him.

Is there Scriptural support for this view of election? Rom. 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2.

Since election is based on foreknowledge it remains then that man is responsible for his own election. Does the Bible teach this? 2 Pet. 1:10.

Let me even go a notch further. Salvation is by grace through faith; sanctification is by grace through faith; and election is by grace through faith.

Romans 9-11 stand as a section in Romans that teaches that God is just in setting aside the Jewish nation for a time and allowing the Gentiles to become part of the kingdom of God. Having taught salvation by grace through faith in Romans 1-8 he will now teach that election is also by grace through faith. Having shown how God has temporarily set aside the nation of Israel as a whole he points out in Romans 11:2 that God has not cast away the people He foreknew. In verse 5 he shows that there is still a remnant of Jewish people according to the election of grace. They are elect by grace. How so? There is a remnant who still chooses God. Glory! Anybody who feels Arminianism does away with God's sovereignty does not understand it correctly.

Now let me come back to Matthew 22:14. Why are many called and few elected or chosen? Very simply because many are called and few choose Christ. If they chose Him He would choose them. Glory!

Further, how could God choose in eternity past some to salvation and some to damnation? He did it on the basis of His foreknowledge of those who would choose Him and those who would not.

Last, I want to make one important point. Revelation 17:14. Who will ultimately enter final glory. Those who are called and chosen and faithful!

III. Limited Atonement

Limited atonement according to Calvinism is this: God elected certain persons in eternity past to salvation. God then sent His Son to die for the elect. Christ did not die for the world He died for the elect only. So the atonement of Christ is limited only to those who believe. I certainly agree with Calvinism that if only those who are elect receive the gift of faith that there is no use for Christ to die for the rest since it is hopeless for them to believe any way.

It is at this point Calvinism goes astray to such a degree that I no longer need to explain why I disagree with this teaching. Verses abound that teach Jesus died for the world. We move on.

VI. Irresistible Grace

The pattern of Calvinism runs like this: Man in his fall became so depraved that he cannot choose to accept the Gospel when he hears it. Therefore, God elected certain individuals to salvation. Then He sent His Son to die for the elect only. This is where irresistible grace comes in. Since man cannot believe on his own, nor will ever choose to do so God sends irresistible grace. And because he cannot help it he accepts Christ.

I need spend no time refuting this teaching. You and I have seen many individuals who have resisted the grace of God. Recently I sat in a Bible school with one of the students from our area. The teacher was teaching a point of Calvinism. He said several times, "If you can't understand this don't lose any sleep over it." After we left the class I said to my friend, "How come you Mennonites were not up and down this teacher?" I would encourage you, if you have young people going to Bible school, get these messages on tape and have them give careful consideration to this teaching.

V. Perseverance of the Saints

We come to the final major point of Calvinism. The teaching is this: Totally depraved man who could not even choose Christ was unconditionally elected, Christ died for him, God sent him irresistible grace and he had to choose to get saved and man once saved in this manner will persevere to the end.

Again, this point should need no refutation. We all know people who started well and even lasted for a time but later turned their back on God. Though it would seem this point need no

refutation that is not the case. Probably the majority of North American believers hold this last point of Calvinism. Today it has the popular title of "Once saved always safe." Not too many people who hold to this fifth point hold to points 2, 3 and 4. Well, it is this fifth point that we will deal with more thoroughly in the next messages. It is interesting that John Calvin, who has written commentaries on every book of the Bible except the book of Revelation makes no comment on Matthew 24:13.

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Review Questions

1. Christians have been divided on the question of eternal the eternal security of the believer throughout Church history.

True False

2. The two major positions are:

3. According to your speaker this issue is a top level doctrinal issue.

True False

4. Give two top level doctrines.

5. Give two second level doctrines.

6. Believers should be able to fellowship together even though they do not hold the same position of eternal security.

True False

7. John Calvin lived from _____ to _____.

8. Calvin's teaching is well summarized by the famous

T _ _ _ _.

9. James Arminias lived from _____ to _____.

10. Your speaker learned his view from:

- John Calvin's teaching
- James Arminias' teaching
- Neither of the above

11. According to your speaker what did John Calvin mean by total depravity?

12. According to Calvinism what must happen to the non-believer before he can accept Christ?

13. What does John 6:44 teach according to Calvinism?

14. How does John 12:32 answer whom God will draw?

15. According to your speaker saving faith...

[] ...is a gift.

[] ...is not a gift.

16. Does 1 Corinthians 12:9 teach that saving faith is a gift? Explain.

17. What did Calvin mean by unconditional election?

18. Calvin's view of election is based on...(two words)

19. According to your speaker election is based on God's...

20. On what ground does the Apostle Peter base election (1 Peter 1:1-2)?

21. According to 2 Peter 1:10 does man have any responsibility with regard to his own election?

22. According to your speaker election is by _____

through _____.

23. What verses in Romans 9-11 indicate that election is by grace through faith?
24. Explain Matthew 22:14b.
25. Explain how God could elect people in eternity past (Eph. 1:4).
26. According to Revelation 17:14, in order for a person to go to be with the Lord he must be _____ and _____ and _____.
27. Explain what Calvin meant by limited atonement.
28. Does the Bible teach limited atonement? Defend your view with Scripture.
29. What does Calvin mean by irresistable grace?
30. From your own understanding would you say irresistable grace is a biblical teaching? Explain briefly.
31. Explain what is meant by perseverance of the saints.

