

The Worldview of Calvinism

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Hello. I am pastor Shawn Mathis. And this is a Providence Point. Short news analysis with deep biblical basis.

Calvinism has been maligned and misunderstood since it was first clearly formulated five-hundred years ago. It has been maligned because those who know it and hate it wish it to disappear. It has been misunderstood because many simply do not know what it is all about.

There are a number of ways to describe it. It is normally identified with the TULIP acronym: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

And that is fine as far as the important question of salvation goes. And it goes far.

Yet, Calvinist leaders and laymen, from John Calvin to Jonathan Edwards, did not base their whole theology upon TULIP—it was rather a result and consequence of a deeper, fundamental principle: the glory of God.

The first question in John Calvin's Geneva Catechism—a series of questions and answers for biblical instruction—set the tone for his approach to the Christian life:

Master. — What is the chief end of human life?

Scholar. — To know God by whom men were created.

Master.—What reason have you for saying so?

Scholar.—Because he created us and placed us in this world to be glorified in us. And it is indeed right that our life, of which himself is the beginning, should be devoted to his glory.

The glory of God was the chief goal of Calvin and the Calvinists. Over one-hundred years later, an august assembly of learned and godly men gathered in England at Westminster Abbey to summarize a common confession of belief. They began the Westminster Shorter Catechism with the same premise as Calvin:

Question 1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer 1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

The question references [1 Corinthians 10:31](#): "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." This has ever been the hallmark of Calvinism in all its ecclesiastical forms. The exaltation, adoration and praise of the glorious Trinity have ever been our song. To glorify God Almighty is to give Him the preeminence in all things.

But how does a Calvinist move from God's glory to the infamous TULIP? They start with the Bible

alone—and the whole Bible. The Old Testament emphasizes God’s majesty and holiness:

“[Israel said] ‘Surely the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives.’”
([Deut. 5:24](#))

As the church of old stood in awe of Yahweh’s absolute moral purity, enormous might and majestic otherliness, so we fall before our covenant Lord. The sense—both intellectual and emotional—of God’s fearsome presence is believed by all orthodox Christians, but Calvinism in particular has a theology that best comports with such beliefs. Like Isaiah of old, we cry: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." The penalty for not glorifying God is death ([Acts 12:23](#)). We sin by not glorifying God. We deserve death.

In general, many would agree with the description so far. The difference comes in the details of sin and salvation. The doctrine of original sin ([Rom. 5:12ff.](#))—that even infants are by nature children of wrath (Ps. 51; [Eph. 1:2](#))—is repellent to many Evangelicals these days. The outworking of that fact is described by Paul: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin is the act and condition of falling short of God’s moral perfection; therefore, it falls short of glorifying the Creator God. This sin is so much a part of fallen man’s nature that Paul contends, “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God” ([Rom. 3:10-11](#)).

If man is born a sinner; if he sins only and continually; if man does not even seek after God, then where is hope? Who then can be saved?

Only those whom the Savior redeems can be saved. God must first seek men. This leads either to the salvation of all or the salvation of some. All orthodox Christians deny the former but many quibble over the latter. Calvinists embrace the latter most heartily because it is Biblical and fully sets forth God’s glory. God is the Alpha and Omega, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

God seeks and finds men in a three-fold way: by appointing, accomplishing and applying. The Father elects those whom He fore-loved ([Rom. 9:14ff.](#)); the Son finished redemption for His sheep by His perfect life and vicarious death, justifying through imputed righteousness ([Rom. 5:12ff.](#) [Phil. 3:9](#)); the Spirit applies the Son’s work, breathing new life and applying the gift of faith alone to the elect, sanctifying their hearts ([John 3:8](#); [Eph. 2:8](#)). Salvation is God-centered.

If Christ’s death is truly a substitutionary death, then those whom He saved will be saved and cannot but be saved. They are saved unto good works, persevering therein by the Spirit’s preservation of their new mind, will and desire ([Eph. 2:10](#)). TULIP flows from the glory of God.

The worldview of Calvinism begins and ends with the preeminence of God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth. And since all of creation was made by God and for God, the worldview of Calvinism embraces

all of creation, in all its complexity. The upcoming series will illustrate the power of that worldview—the power and glory of God in history and through His church.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

[\(Romans 11:33-36\)](#)

More at: <http://polymathis.solideogloria.com/2004/01/year-of-calvinism.html>

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