

A DEFENSE OF CALVINISM

**NOTE: THIS MESSAGE IS FROM C. H. SPURGEON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY,
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IT is a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have received 20 different “gospels” in as many years. How many more they will accept before they get to their journey’s end, it would be difficult to predict. I thank God that He early taught me the gospel, and I have been so perfectly satisfied with it, that I do not want to know any other. Constant change of creed is sure loss; if a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large loft in which to store the apples! When people are always shifting their doctrinal principles, they are not likely to bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. It is good for young believers to begin with a firm hold upon those great fundamental doctrines which the Lord has taught in His Word; why if I believed what some preach about the temporary, showy salvation which only lasts for a time, I would scarcely be at all grateful for it; but when I know that those whom God saves, He saves with an *everlasting* salvation; when I know that He gives to them an *everlasting* righteousness; when I know that He settles them on an *everlasting* foundation of *everlasting* love, and that He will bring them to His *everlasting* kingdom—oh, then I do wonder, and I am astonished that such a blessing as this should ever have been given to me!—

*“Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder!
Ask, ‘Oh, why such love to me?’
Grace has put me in the number
Of the Savior’s family:
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee.”*

I suppose there are some persons whose minds naturally incline towards the doctrine of free will; I can only say that mine inclines as naturally towards the doctrines of sovereign grace! Sometimes, when I see some of the worst characters in the street, I feel as if my heart must burst forth in tears of gratitude that God has never let me act as they have done! I have thought if God had left me alone, and had not touched me by His grace what a great sinner I would have been! I would have run to the utmost lengths of sin, and dived into the very depths of evil! Nor would I have stopped at any vice or folly, if God had not restrained me; I feel that I would have been a very king of sinners if God had let me alone. I cannot understand the reason why I am saved except upon the ground that God would have it so. I cannot, if I look ever so earnestly, discover any kind of reason in myself why I should be a partaker of divine grace. If I am at this moment with Christ, it is only because Christ Jesus would have His will with me, and that will was that I should be with Him where He is, and should share His glory. I can put the crown nowhere but upon the head of Him whose mighty grace has saved me from going down into the pit of hell!

Looking back on my past life, I can see that the dawning of it all was of God—of God *effectively*. I took no torch with which to light the sun, but the sun enlightened me. I did not commence my spiritual life—no, I rather kicked and struggled against the things of the Spirit. When He drew me, for a time I did not run after Him—there was a natural hatred in my soul of everything holy and good! Woings were lost upon me—warnings were cast to the wind—thunders were despised. As for the whispers of His love, they were rejected as being less than nothing and vanity. But, sure I am, I can say now, speaking on behalf of myself, “He only is my salvation.” It was He who turned my heart, and brought me down on my knees before Him. I can in very deed, say with Doddridge and Toplady—

*“Grace taught my soul to pray,
And made my eyes overflow.”*

And coming to this moment, I can add—

*“Tis grace has kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.”*

Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all my-

self, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown all of a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge through having found, once and for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week night, when I was sitting in the House of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, how did you come to be a Christian? I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I would not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him! I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that *He* was the author of my faith—and so, the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, “I ascribe my change wholly to God.”

I once attended a service where the text happened to be, “He shall choose our inheritance for us”—and the good man who occupied the pulpit was more than a little of an Arminian. Therefore, when he commenced, he said, “This passage refers entirely to our *temporal* inheritance; it has nothing whatever to do with our everlasting destiny, for,” he said, “we do not want Christ to choose for us in the matter of heaven or hell. It is so plain and easy that every man who has a grain of common sense will choose heaven, and any person would know better than to choose hell! We have no need of any superior intelligence, or any greater being to choose heaven or hell for us; it is left to our own free will, and we have enough wisdom given us, sufficiently correct means to judge for ourselves.” And therefore, as he very logically inferred, there was no necessity for Jesus Christ, or anyone, to make a choice for us; who could choose the inheritance for ourselves without any assistance. “Ah,” I thought, “but, my good brother, it may be very true that we *could*, but I think we would want something more than common sense before we *would* choose aright.” First, let me ask, must we not all of us admit an overruling providence and the appointment of Jehovah’s hand as to the means whereby we came into this world? Those men, who think that, afterwards, we are left to our own free will to choose this one, or the other to direct our steps, must admit that our *entrance* into the world was not of our own will, but that God had then to choose for us. What circumstances were those in our power which led us to elect certain persons to be our parents? Had we anything to do with it? Did not God Himself appoint our parents, native place and friends?

Could He not have caused me to be born with the skin of the African; brought forth by a filthy mother who would nurse me in her “hut,” and teach me to bow down to pagan gods, quite as easily as to have given me a pious mother, who would each morning and night bend her knees in prayer on my behalf? Or, might He not, if He had pleased, have given me some degenerate to have been my parent—from whose lips I might have early heard fearful, filthy, and obscene language? Might He not have placed me where I would have had a drunken father who would have imprisoned me in a very dungeon of ignorance, and brought me up in the chains of crime? Was it not God’s providence that I had so happy a lot, that both my parents were His children, and endeavored to train me up in the fear of the Lord? John Newton used to tell a whimsical story and laugh at it too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah, sir, the Lord must have loved me *before* I was born, or else He would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.” I am sure it is true in my case. I believe the doctrine of election because I am quite certain that if God had not chosen me, I would never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards! He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine.

I recollect an Arminian brother telling me that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times and could never find the doctrine of election in them; he added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, for he read the Word of God on his knees. I said to him, “I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more the better, but it is a piece of super-

stitution to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for *reading!* As to reading through the Bible 20 times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all—you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures.” If it would be marvelous to see one river leap up from the earth, full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the earth should at once come bubbling up, a million of them born at a birth? What a vision would it be! Who can conceive it? And yet the love of God is that fountain, from which all the rivers of mercy which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time and of glory hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand at that sacred fountainhead and adore and magnify forever and ever, God, even our Father, who has loved us! In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God like unborn forests in the acorn cup—long before the echoes awoke the solitudes—before the mountains were brought forth; long before the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures! Before there was any created being—when the ether was not fanned by an angel’s wings; when space itself had not an existence; when there was nothing save God alone—even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His heart moved with love for His chosen! Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul! Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world—even from eternity! And when He called me by His grace, He said to me, “I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you.” Then, in the fullness of time, He purchased me with His blood; He let His heart run out in one deep gaping wound for me long before I loved Him! Yes, when He first came to me, did I not spurn Him? When He knocked at the door, and asked for entrance, did I not drive Him away and do despite to His grace? Ah, I can remember that I full often did so until, at last, by the power of His effectual grace, He said, “I must, I will come in.” And then He turned my heart, and made me love Him—but even till now I would have resisted Him, had it not been for His grace.

Well, since He purchased me when I was dead in sins, does it not follow, as a necessary and logical consequence, that He must have loved me first? Did my Savior die for me because I believed on Him? No. I was not then in existence! I had then no being. Could the Savior, therefore, have died because I had faith, when I was not yet born? Could that have been possible? Could that have been the origin of the Savior’s love towards me? Oh, no! My Savior died for me long before I believed. “But,” says someone, “He foresaw that you would have faith, and therefore He loved you.” What did He foresee about my faith? Did He foresee that I should get that faith, myself, and that I should believe on Him of myself? No! Christ could not foresee that, because no Christian will ever say that faith came of itself without the gift, and without the working of the Holy Spirit. I have met with a great many believers, and talked with them about this matter, but I never knew one who could put his hand on his heart and say, “I believed in Jesus without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.” I am bound to the doctrine of the depravity of the human heart because I find myself depraved in heart, and have daily proofs that in my flesh there dwells no good thing! If God enters into covenant with unfallen man, man is so insignificant a creature, that it must be an act of gracious condescension on the Lord’s part; but if God enters into covenant with *sinful* man, he is then so offensive a creature, that it must be, on God’s part, an act of pure, free, rich, sovereign grace! When the Lord entered into covenant with me, I am sure that it was all of grace, nothing else but grace; when I remember what a den of unclean beasts and birds my heart was, and how strong was my unrenewed will, how obstinate and rebellious against the sovereignty of the divine rule, I always feel inclined to take the very lowest room in my Father’s house; and when I enter heaven, it will be to go among the less than the least of all saints, and with the chief of sinners.

The late lamented Mr. Denham has put, at the foot of his portrait, a most admirable text, “salvation is of the Lord.” That is just an epitome of Calvinism—it is the sum and substance of it—if anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I would reply, “He is one who says salvation is of the Lord.” I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this; it is the essence of the Bible, “He only is my rock and my salvation.” Tell me anything contrary to this truth of God, and it will be a heresy! Tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence *here*, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rock truth, “God is my rock and my salvation.” What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the

perfect merits of Jesus Christ—the bringing in of the works of the flesh to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism, but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touchstone, will discover itself here! I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism; it is a nickname to call it Calvinism—Calvinism is the gospel and nothing else! I do not believe we can preach the gospel if we do not preach justification by faith, without works—nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace—nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah! Nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ worked out upon the cross. Nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and allows the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus! Such a gospel I abhor—

*“If ever it should come to pass,
That sheep of Christ might fall away,
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day.”*

If one dear saint of God had perished, so might all! If one of the covenant ones is lost, so may all be! And then there is no gospel promise true, but the Bible is a lie, and there is nothing in it worth my acceptance. I will be an infidel at once when I can believe that a saint of God can ever fall finally! If God has loved me once, then He will love me forever; God has a mastermind—He arranged everything in His gigantic intellect long before He did it—and once having settled it, He never alters it! “This shall be done,” He says, and the iron hand of destiny marks it down, and it is brought to pass. “This is My purpose,” and it stands—neither earth or hell alter it. “This is My decree,” He says, “promulgate it, you holy angels. Rend it down from the gate of heaven, you devils, if you can—but you cannot alter the decree—it shall stand forever.” God alters not His plans. Why should He? He is Almighty, and therefore can perform His pleasure. Why should He? He is the all-wise, and therefore cannot have planned wrongly. Why should He? He is the everlasting God, and therefore cannot die before His plan is accomplished. Why should He change? You worthless atoms of earth, ephemera of a day! You creeping insects upon this bay-leaf of existence—you may change *your* plans—but He shall never, never change His! Has He told me that His plan is to save me? If so, I am forever safe—

*“My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase,
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”*

I do not know how some people who believe that a Christian can fall from grace manage to be happy. It must be a very commendable thing in them to be able to get through a day without despair! If I did not believe the doctrine of the final perseverance of the Saints, I think I would be, of all men, the most miserable, because I should lack any ground of comfort. I could not say, whatever state of heart I came into, that I should be like a well-spring of water whose stream fails not; I should rather have to take the comparison of an intermittent spring that might stop all of a sudden, or a reservoir which I had no reason to expect would always be full. I believe that the happiest of Christians, and the truest of Christians are those, who never dare to doubt God, but who take His Word simply as it stands, and believe it and ask no questions—just feeling assured that if God has said it, it will be so. I bear my willing testimony that I have no reason, nor even the shadow of a reason, to doubt my Lord, and I challenge heaven and earth, and hell to bring any proof that God is untrue! From the depths of hell I call the fiends, and from this earth I call the tried and afflicted believers, and to heaven I appeal and challenge the long experience of the blood-washed host—and there is not to be found in the three realms, a single person who can bear witness to one fact which can disprove the faithfulness of God, or weaken His claim to be trusted by His servants! There are many things that may or may not happen, but this I know shall happen—

*“He shall present my soul,
Unblemished and complete,
Before the glory of His face,*

Tell someone today how much you love Jesus Christ.

With joys divinely great.”

All the purposes of man have been defeated, but not the purposes of God! The promises of man may be broken—many of them are *made* to be broken—but the promises of God shall all be fulfilled! He is a promise-maker, but He never was a promise-breaker; He is a promise-keeping God, and every one of His people shall prove it to be so. This is my grateful, personal confidence, “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me”—unworthy me, lost and ruined me! He will yet save me. And—

*“I, among the blood-washed throng,
Shall wave the palm and wear the crown,
And shout loud victor.”*

I go to a land which the plow of earth has never upturned; where it is greener than earth’s best pastures, and richer than her most abundant harvests ever saw! I go to a building of more gorgeous architecture than man has ever built—it is not of mortal design—it is “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” All I shall know and enjoy in heaven will be given to me by the Lord, and I shall say, when at last I appear before Him—

*“Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”*

I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus—if my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds! I cannot, I dare not, allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind—it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ’s finished work, I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. There is sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds had they transgressed their Maker’s law! Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question! Having a divine person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; boundaries and measure are inapplicable terms to the divine Sacrifice! The intent of the divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work. Think of the numbers upon whom God has bestowed His grace; think of the countless hosts in heaven—if you were introduced there today, you would find it as easy to count the stars, or the sands of the sea, as to count the multitudes that are before the throne even now! They have come from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South, and they are sitting down with Abraham and with Isaac, and with Jacob in the kingdom of God.

Beside those in heaven, think of the saved ones on earth. Blessed be God, His elect on earth are to be counted by millions! I believe the days are coming, brighter days than these, when there shall be multitudes upon multitudes brought to know the Savior, and to rejoice in Him. The Father’s love is not only for a few, but for an exceedingly great company. “A great multitude, which no man could number,” will be found in heaven! A man can reckon up to very high figures; set to work your Newtons, your mightiest calculators, and they can count great numbers; but God, and God alone, can tell the multitude of His redeemed! I believe there will be more in heaven than in hell. If anyone asks me why I think so, I answer, because Christ, in everything, is to “have the pre-eminence,” and I cannot conceive how He could have the pre-eminence if there are to be more in the dominions of Satan than in Paradise. Moreover, I have never read that there is to be in hell a great multitude which no man could number. I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to Paradise; think what a multitude there is of them! Then there are already in heaven unnumbered myriads of the spirits of just men made perfect—the redeemed of all nations and kindreds and people, and tongues up till now. And there are better times coming, when the religion of Christ shall be universal—

*“He shall reign from pole to pole,
With illimitable sway,”*

when whole kingdoms shall bow down before Him, and nations shall be born in a day, and in the thousand years of the great millennial state, there will be enough saved to make up all the deficiencies of the thousands of years that have gone before! Christ shall be Master everywhere, and His praise shall be

sounded in every land. Christ shall have the pre-eminence at last; His train shall be far larger than that which shall attend the chariot of the grim monarch of hell!

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement, because, they say, “It is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men. It commends itself,” they say, “to the instincts of humanity! There is something in it full of joy and beauty.” I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with lies! There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were lost before He died; if the doctrine is true—that He died for all men—then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world—for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins! Once again—if it were Christ’s intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed, for we have His own testimony that there is a lake which burns with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with His blood! That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption! To think that my Savior died for men who were, or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain! To imagine for a moment that He was the substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the substitute, afterwards punished the sinners, seems to conflict with all my ideas of divine justice; that Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever have been imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities! God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and God!

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer—I wish to be called nothing but a Christian—but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin? I reply I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it; but far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views! Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him, that while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man, himself, I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan. And if there were needed two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield, and John Wesley! The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God. He lived far above the ordinary level of common Christians, and was one “of whom the world was not worthy.” I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths of Calvinism, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Savior, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of heaven. I do not think I differ from any of my Hyper-Calvinistic brothers and sisters in what I do believe, but I differ from them in what they do *not* believe. I do not hold any less than they do, but I hold a little more, and I think, a little more of the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. Not only are there a few cardinal doctrines by which we can steer our ship North, South, East, or West, but as we study the Word, we shall begin to learn something about the Northwest, and Northeast, and all else that lies between the four cardinal points. The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two—no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one book of the Bible, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is thirsty come; and whoever wills, let him take the water of life freely.” Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired Word, that, “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” I see in one place God in providence presiding over all, and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions, in a great measure, to his own free will.

Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act that there was no control of God over his actions, I would be driven very near to atheism. But if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so overrules all things that man is not free enough to be responsible, I would be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can clearly see; they are believed to be inconsistent, and contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is foreordained—that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions—that is true! It is only *my* folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths of God can ever contradict each other! I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any *earthly* anvil—but they certainly shall be one in *eternity*. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge—but they *do converge*—and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, where all of His truths spring!

It is often said that the doctrines we believe, have a tendency to lead us to sin; I have heard it asserted most positively that those high doctrines which we love, and which we find in the Scriptures, are licentious ones! I do not know who will have the hardihood to make that assertion when they consider that the holiest of men have been believers in them. I ask the man who dares to say that Calvinism is a licentious religion, what he thinks of the character of Augustine, or Calvin, or Whitefield, who in successive ages were the great exponents of the system of grace? Or what will he say of the Puritans, whose works are full of them? Had a man been an Arminian in those days, he would have been accounted the vilest heretic breathing; but now *we* are looked upon as the heretics and *they* as the orthodox! We have gone back to the old school; we can trace our descent from the apostles; it is that vein of free grace running through the sermonizing of Baptists which has saved us as a denomination! Were it not for that, we should not stand where we are today. We can run a golden line up to Jesus Christ, Himself, through a holy succession of mighty fathers who all held these glorious truths—and we can ask concerning them—“Where will you find holier and better men in the world?” No doctrine is so calculated to preserve a man from sin as the doctrine of the grace of God—those who have called it “a licentious doctrine”—did not know anything at all about it. Poor ignorant things—they little knew that their own vile stuff was the most licentious doctrine under heaven; if they knew the grace of God in truth, they would soon see that there was no preservative from lying like a knowledge that we are elect of God from the foundation of the world; there is nothing like a belief in my eternal perseverance, and the immutability of my Father’s affection which can keep me near to Him from a motive of simple gratitude! Nothing makes a man so virtuous as belief of the truths of God! A lying doctrine will soon beget a lying practice; a man cannot have an erroneous belief without, by-and-by, having an erroneous life. I believe the one thing naturally begets the other. Of all men—those have the most unselfish piety, the most sublime reverence, the most ardent devotion—who believe that they are saved by grace, without works, through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God! Christians should take heed and see that it always is so, lest by any means Christ should be crucified afresh, and put to an open shame.

MISREPRESENTATIONS OF TRUE CALVINISM CLEARED AWAY

*Note: In the year 1861, the church of which Mr. C. H Spurgeon was pastor, completed its tremendous new structure, the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The first sermon by Mr. Spurgeon in this new building was preached on Monday afternoon, March 25th. A few days later in this new building, on Thursday, April 1st, Mr. Spurgeon had what we today would call a Bible Conference. The theme of the conference was, “Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace.” The speakers and their subjects were as follows—election by John Bloomfield; human depravity by Evan Probert; particular redemption by James A. Spurgeon, Mr. Spurgeon’s brother; effectual calling by James Smith, and the final perseverance of believers in Christ Jesus by William O’Neil. Mr. Spurgeon, as pastor of the church, was the “Master of Ceremonies,” and he gave the following introductory message as printed in Volume 7 of *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*.*

The main body of this message is as follows:

There is nothing upon which men need to be more instructed than upon the question of what Calvinism really is. The most infamous allegations have been brought against us, and sometimes, I must fear, by men who knew them to be utterly untrue; and to this day there are many of our opponents who, when they run short of matter, invent and make for themselves a man of straw! They call that man of straw, John Calvin, and then shoot all their arrows at it. We have not come here to defend your man of straw; shoot at him or burn him as you will, and if it suits your convenience, go ahead and still oppose doctrines which were never taught, and rail at fictions which, save in your brain, were never in existence! We come here to state what our views really are, and we trust that any who do not agree with us will do us the justice of not misrepresenting us. If they can disprove our doctrines, let them state them fairly, and then overthrow them—but why should they first caricature our opinions, and then afterwards attempt to put them down?

Among the gross falsehoods which have been uttered against the Calvinists proper is the wicked slander that we hold the damnation of little infants. A baser lie was never uttered! There may have existed somewhere—in some corner of the earth—an evildoer who would dare to say that there were infants in hell, but I have never met with him, nor have I met with a man who ever saw such a person. We say, with regard to infants, Scripture said but very little, and therefore, where Scripture is confessedly scant, it is for no man to determine dogmatically; but I think I speak for the entire body, or certainly with exceedingly few exceptions, and those unknown to me, when I say we hold that all infants are elect of God, and are, therefore, saved, and we look to this as being the means by which Christ shall see of the travail of His soul to a great degree, and we do sometimes hope that thus the multitude of the saved shall be made to exceed the multitude of the lost. Whatever views our friends may hold upon the point, they are not necessarily connected with Calvinistic doctrine. I believe that the Lord Jesus, who said, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven,” does daily and constantly receive into His loving arms those tender ones who are only shown, and then snatched away to heaven. Our hymns are no ill witness to our faith on this point, and one of them runs thus—

*“Millions of infant souls compose
The family above.”*

Toplady, one of the keenest of Calvinists, was of this number. “In my remarks,” he says, “on Dr. Newell, I testified my firm belief that the souls of *all departed infants* are with God in glory—that in the decree of predestination to life, God has included all whom He decreed to take away in infancy—and that the decree of reprobation has nothing to do with them.” No, he proceeds farther, and asks, with reason, how the anti-Calvinistic system of conditional salvation, and election, or good works foreseen, will suit with the salvation of infants? It is plain that Arminians and Pelagians must introduce a *new principle* of election—and in so far as the salvation of infants is concerned, become Calvinists! Is it not an argument in behalf of Calvinism that its principle is uniform throughout, and that no change is needed on the ground on which man is saved, whether young or old? John Newton, of London, the friend of Cowper, noted for his Calvinism, holds that the children in heaven exceed its adult inhabitants in their entire multitudinous array! Gill, a very champion of Calvinism, held the doctrine that all dying in infancy are saved; an intelligent modern writer, Dr. Russell of Dundee, also a Calvinist, maintains the same views. When it is considered that nearly *one-half* of the human race die in early years, it is easy to see what a vast accession must be daily and hourly making to the blessed population of heaven!

A more common charge, brought by more decent people, for I must say that the last charge is never brought except by disreputable persons—a more common charge is that we hold clear fatalism! Now, there may be Calvinists who are fatalists, but Calvinism and fatalism are two distinct things. Do not most Christians hold the doctrine of the providence of God? Do not all Christians; do not all believers in God hold the doctrine of His foreknowledge? All the difficulties which are laid against the doctrine of predestination might, with equal force, be laid against that of divine foreknowledge. We believe that God has predestinated all things from the beginning, but there is a difference between the predestination of an intelligent, all-wise, all-bounteous God, and that blind fatalism which simply says, “It is because it

is to be.” Between the *predestination of Scripture*, and the fate of the Koran, every sensible man must perceive a difference of the most essential character. We do not deny that the thing is so ordained that it must be, but *why* is it to be but that the Father—God—whose name is love, ordained it? Not because of any necessity in circumstances that such-and-such a thing should take place; though the wheels of providence revolve with rigid exactness, yet not without purpose and wisdom! The wheels are full of eyes, and everything ordained is so ordained that it shall conduce to the grandest of all ends—the glory of God—and next to that, the good of His creatures.

But we are next met by some who tell us that we preach the wicked and horrible doctrine of *sovereign and unmerited reprobation*. “Oh,” they say, “you teach that men are damned because God made them to be damned, and that they go to hell, not because of *sin*, not because of *unbelief*—but because of some dark decree with which God has stamped their destiny.” Brothers and sisters, this is another unfair charge! Election does *not* involve reprobation! There may be some who hold unconditional reprobation, but I stand not here as their defender—let them defend themselves as best they can! I hold God’s election, but I testify just as clearly that if any man is lost, he is lost for *sin*. This has been the uniform statement of Calvinistic ministers. I might refer you to our standards such as “The Westminster Assembly’s Catechism” and to all our Confessions, for they all distinctly state that man is lost for sin, and that there is no punishment put on any man except that which he richly and righteously deserves. If any of you have ever uttered that libel against us, do it not again—for we are as guiltless of that as you are yourselves! I am speaking personally—and I think in this I would command the suffrages of my brothers—I do know that the appointment of God extends to all things; I stand not in this pulpit, nor in any other to lay the damnation of any man anywhere but upon himself! If he is lost, damnation is *all of men*. But, if he is saved, salvation is still *all of God*.

To state this important point yet more clearly and explicitly, I shall quote at large from an able Presbyterian divine—“The pious Methodist is taught that the Calvinist represents God as creating men in order to destroy them; he is taught that Calvinists hold that men are lost, not because they sin, but because they are non-elected. Believing this to be a true statement, is it not amazing that the Methodist stops short, and declares himself, if not an Arminian, at least an anti-predestinarian? But no *statement can be more scandalously untrue*. It is the uniform doctrine of Calvinism that God creates all for His own glory—that He is infinitely righteous and kind, and that where men perish, it is only for their sins. In speaking of suffering, whether in this world, or in the world to come—whether it respects angels or men, the Westminster standards (which may be considered as the most authoritative modern statement of the system) invariably connect the punishment with previous sin, and sin only—‘As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a *righteous* Judge, FOR their SINS does blind and harden, from them He not only withholds His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and worked upon in their hearts, but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as *their corruption* makes occasion of sin; and withal gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they *harden themselves* even under those means which God uses for the softening of others.’

“The Larger Catechism, speaking of the unsaved among angels and men, says, ‘God, according to His sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsel of His own will (whereby He extends or withholds favor as He pleases) has passed by and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, *to before their sin inflicted*, to the praise of the glory of His justice.’ Again, ‘The end of God appointing this day (of the last judgment) is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect, and of His justice in the damnation of the reprobate *who are wicked and disobedient*.’

“This is no more than what the Methodist and all other Evangelical bodies acknowledge—that where men perish it is in consequence of their *sin*. If it is asked why sin which destroys is permitted to enter the world; that is a question which bears not only on the Calvinist, but equally on all other parties. They are as much concerned and bound to answer it as he. No, the question is not confined to Christians. All who believe in the existence of God—in His righteous character and perfect providence are equally under obligation to answer it. Whatever may be the reply of others, that of the Calvinist may be regarded as given in the statement of the Confession of Faith, which declares that God’s providence extends itself

even to the first fall and other sins of angels and men, etc.—*Yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be ‘the author or approver of sin.’* It is difficult to see what more could be said upon the subject; and if such is the undoubted sentiments of Calvinists, then what misrepresentation can be more gross than that which describes them as holding that sinners perish irrespective of their sin, or that God is the author of their sin? What is the declaration of Calvin? *‘Every soul departs (at death) to that place which it has prepared for itself while in this world.’* It is hard to be charged with holding as sacred truth what one abhors as horrid blasphemy, and yet this is the treatment which has been perseveringly meted out to Calvinists in spite of the most solemn and indignant disclaimers! Against nothing have they more stoutly protested than the thought that the infinitely holy and righteous, and amiable Jehovah is the author of sin—and yet how often do the supporters of rival systems charge them with this as an article of faith?”

A yet further charge against us is that we dare not preach the gospel to the unregenerate! That, in fact, our theology is so narrow and cramped, that we cannot preach to sinners! Gentlemen, if you dare to say this, I would take you to any library in the world where the old Puritan fathers are stored up, and I would let you take down any one volume and tell me if you ever read more telling exhortations and addresses to sinners in any of your own books! Did not Bunyan plead with sinners and whoever classed him with any but the Calvinists? Did not Charnock, Goodwin, and Howe agonize for souls, and what were they but Calvinists? Did not Jonathan Edwards preach to sinners, and who more clear and explicit on these doctrinal matters? The works of our innumerable divines teem with passionate appeals to the unconverted! Oh, sirs, if I should begin the list, time should fail me; it is an indisputable fact that we have labored more than they all for the winning of souls! Was George Whitefield any the less seraphic? Did his eyes weep the fewer tears or his heart move with less compassion because he believed in God’s electing love, and preached the sovereignty of the Most High? It is an unfounded slander! Our souls are not stony; our hearts are not withdrawn from the compassion which we ought to feel for our fellow men; we can hold all our views, and yet can weep as Christ did over a Jerusalem which was certainly to be destroyed! Again I must say I am not defending certain brothers who have exaggerated Calvinism. I speak of Calvinism proper—not that which has run to seed, and outgrown its beauty and verdure. I speak of it as I find it in Calvin’s *Institutes*, and especially in his *Expositions*. I have read them carefully. I take not my views of Calvinism from common repute, but from his books; nor do I, in thus speaking, even vindicate Calvinism as if I cared for the *name*, but I mean that glorious system which teaches that salvation is of grace from first to last! And again, then, I say it is an utterly unfounded charge that we dare not preach to sinners!

And then further, that I may clear up these points, and leave the less rubbish for my brothers to wheel away—we have sometimes heard it said, but those who say it ought to go to school to read the first book of history—that we who hold Calvinistic views are the *enemies of revivals*. Why, sirs, in the history of the Church, with but few exceptions, you could not find a revival at all that was not produced by the orthodox faith! What was that great work which was done by Augustine when the church suddenly woke up from the diseased and deadly sleep into which Pelagian doctrine had cast it? What was the Reformation, itself, but the waking up of men’s minds to those old truths of God? However far modern Lutherans may have turned aside from their ancient doctrines—and I must confess some of them would not agree with what I now say, yet, at any rate—Luther and Calvin had no dispute about predestination! Their views were identical, and Luther’s, *On the Bondage of the Will* is as strong a book upon the free grace of God as Calvin, himself, could have written. Hear that great thunder while he cries in that book, “Let the Christian reader know, then, that God foresees nothing in a contingent manner—but that He foresees, proposes, and acts from His eternal and unchangeable will! This is the thunder stroke which breaks and overturns free will.” Do I need mention to you better names than Huss, Jerome of Prague, Fartel, John Knox, Wickliffe, Wishart, and Bradford? Need I do more than say that these held the same views and that in their day anything like an Arminian revival was utterly unheard of and undreamed of? And then, to come to more modern times, there is the great exception—that wondrous revival under Mr. Wesley in which the Wesleyan Methodists had so large a share. But permit me to say that the strength of the doctrine of Wesleyan Methodism lay in its Calvinism! The great body of the Methodists disclaimed

Pelagianism in whole and in part; they contended for man's entire depravity, the necessity of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, and that the first step in the change proceeds not from the sinner, but from God. They denied at the time that they were Pelagians; does not the Methodist hold as firmly as ever we do, that man is saved by the operation of the Holy Spirit and only the Holy Spirit?

And are not many of Mr. Wesley's sermons full of that great truth—that the Holy Spirit is necessary to regeneration? Whatever mistakes he may have made, he continually preached the absolute necessity of the new birth by the Holy Spirit! And there are some other points of exceedingly close agreement; for instance, even that of human inability. It matters not how some may abuse us when we say man could not of himself repent or believe—yet the old Arminian standards said the same. True, they affirm that God has given grace to every man, but they do not dispute the fact, that apart from that grace, there was no ability in man to do that which was good in his own salvation. And then let me say—if you turn to the continent of America, how gross the falsehood that Calvinistic doctrine is unfavorable to revivals! Look at that wondrous shaking under Jonathan Edwards and others which we might quote. Or turn to Scotland—what shall we say of M'Cheyne? What shall we say of those renowned Calvinists—Chalmers, Wardlaw, and before them, Livingstone, Haldane, Erskine, and the like? What shall we say of the men of their school but that, while they held and preached unflinchingly the great truths which we would propound today, yet God acknowledged their word, and multitudes were saved? And if it were not perhaps too much like boasting of one's own work under God, I might say personally I have never found the preaching of these doctrines lull this church to sleep! But always while we have loved to maintain these truths of God, we have agonized for the souls of men, and the 1,600 or more whom I have myself baptized upon profession of their faith, are living testimonies that these old truths in modern times have not lost their power to promote a revival of religion!

I have thus cleared away these allegations at the outset. I shall now need a few minutes more to say, with regard to the Calvinistic system, that there are some things to be said in its layout to which, of course, I attach but little comparative importance; but they ought not to be ignored. It is a fact that the system of doctrines called the Calvinistic, is so *exceedingly simple*, and so readily learned, that as a system of divinity it is more easily taught, and more easily grasped by unlettered minds than any other. The poor have the gospel preached to them in a style which assists their memories, and commends itself to their judgments; it is a system which was practically acknowledged on high philosophic grounds by such men as Bacon, Leibnitz and Newton, and yet it can charm the soul of a child, and expand the intellect of a peasant! And then it has another virtue. I take it that the last is no mean one, but it has another—that when it is preached, there is a something in it which *excites thought*. A man may hear sermons upon the other theory which shall glance over him as the swallow's wing gently sweeps the brook—but these old doctrines either make a man so angry, that he goes home, and cannot sleep for very hatred—or else they bring him down into lowliness of thought, feeling the immensity of the things which he has heard! Either way, it excites and stirs him up not temporarily, but in a most lasting manner. These doctrines haunt him; he kicks against the pricks, and full often the Word forces a way into his soul! And I think this is no small thing for any doctrine to do—in an age given to slumber, and with human hearts so indifferent to the truth of God. I know that many men have gained more good by being made angry under a sermon than by being pleased by it—for being angry, they have turned the truth of God over and over again, and at last that truth has burned its way right into their hearts!

It also has this singular virtue—it is so coherent in all its parts. You cannot vanquish a Calvinist; you may think you can, but you cannot! The stones of the great doctrines so fit into each other that the more pressure there is applied to remove them, the more strenuously do they adhere. And you may mark that you cannot receive one of these doctrines without believing all! Hold, for instance, that man is utterly depraved, and you draw the inference, then, that certainly if God has such a creature to deal with, salvation must come from God alone! And if from Him, the offended one, to an *offending* creature—then He has a right to give or withhold His mercy as He wills—you are thus forced upon election, and when you have gotten that, you have all—the others must follow. Some, by putting the strain upon their judgments, may manage to hold two or three points, and not the rest; but sound logic, I take it, requires a man to hold the whole or reject the whole! The doctrines stand like soldiers in a square, presenting on

every side a line of defense which is hazardous to attack, but easy to maintain. And mark you—in these times when error is so rife, and neology strives to be so rampant, it is no little thing to put into the hands of a young man a weapon which can slay his foes—a weapon he can easily learn to handle—which he may grasp tenaciously, wield readily, and carry without fatigue. A weapon, I may add, which no rust can corrode, and no blows can break—effective and well annealed—a true Jerusalem blade of a temper fit for deeds of renown! The coherency of the parts, though it is, of course, but a trifle in comparison with other things, is not unimportant.

And then, I add, but this is the point my brothers will take up—it has this excellence—that it is *Scriptural*, and that it is *consistent with the experience of believers*. Men generally grow more Calvinistic as they advance in years. Is not that a sign that the doctrine is right? As they are growing riper for heaven; as they are getting nearer to the rest that remains for the people of God; the soul longs to feed on the finest of the wheat and abhors chaff and husks. And then, I add—and, in so doing, I would refute a slander that has sometimes been urged—this glorious truth has this excellence, that it *produces the holiest of men*. We can look back through all our annals and say, to those who oppose us, you can mention no names of men more holy, more devoted, more loving, more generous than those which we can mention! The saints of our calendar, though economized by Rome, rank first in the book of life; the name of Puritan needs only to be heard to compel our reverence; holiness has reached a height among them which is rare, indeed, and well it might, for they loved and lived the truth of God! And if you say that our doctrine is harmful to human liberty, we point you to Oliver Cromwell, and to his brave Ironsides, Calvinists to a man! If you say it leads to inaction, we point you to the Pilgrim fathers, and the wilderness they subdued. We can put our finger upon every spot of land the wide world over, and say, “Here was something done by a man who believed in God’s decrees, and, inasmuch as he did this, it is proof it did not make him inactive, it did not lull him to sloth.”

The better way, however, of proving this point, is for each of us who hold these truths of God to be more prayerful, more watchful, more holy, more active than we have ever been before, and by so doing, we shall put to silence the gainsaying of foolish men! A living argument is an argument which tells upon every man. We cannot deny what we see and feel. Be it ours, if maligned, to disprove it by a blameless life, and it shall yet come to pass that our church and its sentiments, too, shall come forth, “Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.”

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