

## What is Calvinism?

Calvinism is a term used to denote apostolic teaching, primarily on salvation. It derives from the Reformation theologian John Calvin who brilliantly systematised Protestant Reformed truth in the mid-1500s. Although French, he ministered mainly in Geneva. Calvin's, teaching systematically covers much more than the essential truths of salvation, but the term is mostly used to describe his exposition of this. Calvinism was not invented by him, but was merely his preaching of Biblical truths as taught by Paul and later expounded by great men including Augustine. It became the basis of the Reformed faith as opposed to Lutheranism, which had departed from the purity established by Martin Luther. Calvinism affirms that salvation is all of grace.

As any reader of his 'Institutes' will see, what Calvin centred on was not predestination, but the glory of the sovereign God. All his teaching is rooted in God's glory and his sovereign control over all things, especially the salvation of men. There have been few men who were as godly, humble, hard-working, utterly Biblical and committed to honour God as John Calvin. For this he has been stigmatised, slandered and vilified; even by supposed Christians.

After his death, attacks on the pure Reformed faith led to theologians summarising Calvin's teaching on the Doctrines of Grace under the mnemonic TULIP (see 'Arminianism'). This is what most people understand as Calvinism: **T**: total depravity [man's natural will is only ever opposed to God].

**U**: unconditional election [God elects those he will save in eternity].

**L**: limited atonement (or definite atonement, or particular redemption). [Christ only atones for the sins of those God has chosen.]

**I**: irresistible grace [God's Spirit gives the effective will to believe and repent].

**P**: perseverance of the saints. [God definitely saves and glorifies his people.]

All these doctrines follow from the inability of man to do good or save himself, as a result of Adam's fall, and highlight the saving power of God to do what man cannot. God's grace even gives faith and repentance to those he draws to Christ. His love ensures that they remain faithful to the end.

True Calvinism always encourages Gospel preaching; indeed it was Calvin that sent out one of the first missionaries (to Brazil). Further, it tirelessly seeks to promote godliness in believers. It is never inactive.

If we were to summarise the essence of Calvinism, it would be the affirmation that 'God is Lord and sovereign'. If there is a chief method of Calvinism, it is to expound only what the Bible teaches.

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