

Predestination and Assurance of Salvation

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Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" **John 11:25-26**

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." **1 John 5:13**

Many people are surprised that Calvinists seem so fervent in preaching the Gospel despite believing every person's salvation is pre-determined. The reason they appear to have such fervor is Calvinism, in terms of having any assurance that one is one of the elect, is a *works-oriented doctrine*. This is ironic because it is the Calvinists that accuse non-Calvinists of salvation by works because the non-Calvinist believes that one has to make a conscious decision to accept or reject Christ. Calvinism is the works doctrine because:

- a. On the surface Calvinists attribute their zeal to their faith as being one of the *elect and* will tell you they are being *obedient* in following the Great Commission. When pressed, they admit that their efforts make no difference in whether someone accepts the Lord or not, not even as a tool used by the Lord as the matter is already determined. That they are obedient is all that matters.
- b. A hyper-Calvinist will tell you God has already pre-determined who will be saved. The moderate-Calvinist puts it a little differently. The moderate says God wants everyone to be saved but still predetermines that certain people will go to hell. To explain this the moderate Calvinist teaches God has two conflicting wills (God wants everyone saved but still predestines who will be saved and who is destined for hell). The end result is the same.
- c. John Calvin taught that God gives some people *true faith* and others *false faith*.

These three ideas invented by Calvinists naturally cause them to wonder about assurance of their own salvation. This is not just my opinion but is substantiated by the writings of John Calvin himself, the writings of the Puritans, and the writings of modern day Calvinists. These Calvinists all wondered just how they can know they are one of the elect who has been predestined for heaven and not for hell.

Their conclusion is while their performance may not earn their salvation it plays a large part in helping them to know whether or not they are one of the elect, but still they are never certain. What a conundrum. If they back off on their works to prove they have salvation by faith and not works then they wonder if they have faith at all. Then is the faith they have a false faith given by God?

Howard Marshall makes an excellent observation, "Whoever said, 'The Calvinist knows he cannot fall from salvation but does not know whether he has got it,' had it summed up nicely."¹

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Calvinism itself fosters doubts as John Calvin writes, “*For there is scarcely a mind in which the thought does not rise, Whence your salvation but from the election of God? But what proof have you of your election? When once this thought has taken possession of any individual, it keeps him perpetually miserable, subjects him to dire torment, or throws him into a state of complete stupor.... Therefore, we dread shipwreck, we must avoid this rock, which is fatal to everyone who strikes upon it...*”²

Along the same line John Calvin also wrote, “*Among the temptations with which Satan assaults believers, none is greater or more perilous, than when disquieting them with doubts as to their election, he at the same time stimulates them with a depraved desire of inquiring after it out of the proper way...I mean when puny man endeavors to penetrate to the hidden recesses of divine wisdom...in order that he may understand what final determination God has made with regard to him.*”³ Apparently John Calvin thought at the time it was wrong to desire assurance of one’s salvation.

It appears that closer to his death John Calvin wasn’t so certain if he was one of the elect or not. John Calvin wrote in his will, “*I humbly seek from God...to be washed and purified by the great Redeemer’s blood, shed for the sins of the human race...*”⁴ That doesn’t sound like man who has assurance of his election. Contrast John Calvin’s apprehension to the assurance in 1 John 5:13. Jesus stated in John 11:25-26 all we have to do is *believe* in him. It’s simple. We don’t have to worry about God having two conflicting wills or if He has given us false faith. We can *know* that we have eternal life; we don’t have to guess or wonder about it.

John Calvin was not alone in his doubts, even R.C. Sproul writes, “*A while back I had one of those moments of acute self-awareness...and suddenly the question hit me, “R.C., what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?” Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with a chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified... I began to take stock of my life, and I looked at my performance...*”⁵ I get back to his conclusion in just a bit.

Dave Hunt writes regarding R.C. Sproul’s concern for his salvation and missing how the Bible gives absolute assurance in 1 John 5:13, “*Why doesn’t Sproul rely on such promises? Because, for a Calvinist, the question is not whether one has believed the gospel but whether one, from eternity past, was predetermined to be among the elect.*”⁶

A common misconception is the “P” in Calvinism’s TULIP --*Perseverance of the Saints* deals with eternal security, in other words “*once saved always saved.*” Based on writings from John Calvin, R.C. Sproul and others, one would think “P” stands for *Performance* which means if you fail at some point, you have lost performance-based assurance.

Regarding the P in TULIP, Zane C. Hodges points out, “*The result of this theology is disastrous. Since according to Puritan belief, the genuineness of a man’s faith can only be determined by the life that follows it, assurance of salvation becomes impossible at the moment of conversion.*”⁷

R.T. Kendall wrote, “*Nearly all the Puritan ‘divines’ went through great doubt and despair on their deathbeds as they realized their lives did not give perfect evidence that they were the elect.*”⁸

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So how does a Calvinist exhibit evidence that they are one of the elect? Piper and his staff write, “[W]e must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith.”⁹ The *faith* they are speaking of is the *faith* that God gives you, or withholds from you.

Ironically “...in the ‘P’ of TULIP...the emphasis is upon the *believer’s* faithfulness in persevering—not upon God’s power.”¹⁰ Bob Wilken of Grace Evangelical Society reports what he heard at Sproul’s Ligonier National Conference, June 15-17, 2000 in Orlando Florida, “John Piper...described himself as ‘a seven-point Calvinist’ ...[and said] that a Christian can’t be sure that he is a true believer; hence there is an ongoing need to be dedicated to the Lord and deny ourselves so that we might make it.”¹¹

Boettner quotes Warfield “*It is idle to seek assurance of election outside of holiness of life.*”¹² Likewise Charles Hodges declares, “*the only evidence of our election... [and] perseverance, is a patient continuance in well-doing.*”¹³ As I stated earlier, Calvinism is a works-oriented doctrine.

Can any Calvinist know for sure if they are saved? Dave Hunt tells us, “Calvin taught that being born into a Calvinist family automatically made the child one of the elect, as did infant baptism, so long as one believed in its efficacy. Thus, while believing in the gospel is no sure way to be saved, believing in one’s infant baptism is.”¹⁴ Even R.C. Sproul states, “Infants can be born again, although the faith they exercise cannot be as visible as that as adults.”¹⁵

Adding to the problem of whether one’s works point to genuine salvation are two other troubling ideas. First, MacArthur, Sproul, Piper and others believe that *God has two conflicting wills*; that He genuinely *wants everyone* to be saved on the one hand and that He has predestined only certain people for salvation on the other. Second, John Calvin says God gives some people “*false faith*,” which makes it impossible to know if you have true faith or not.

Two Wills of God

John Piper, in his attempt to make Calvinism say that God loves those whom He has predestined to eternal damnation must support the delusion that *God has two wills which are contrary to one another*.

Dave Hunt writes, “John Piper attempts to absolve moderates of being ‘hyper’ by claiming (like MacArthur) that God has ‘two wills’ and that it is not ‘divine schizophrenia’ for God to will that all persons be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and ‘...to elect [only] those who will actually be saved.’”¹⁶ This is double talk! He [Piper] goes so far as to say, ‘Every time the gospel is preached to unbelievers it is the mercy of God that gives this opportunity for salvation.’¹⁷ That preaching the gospel gives opportunity for salvation to those for whom Christ did not die, whom God never had any intention of saving and whom He in fact had already predestined to eternity in the Lake of Fire, is the height of contradiction. It is, however, only one of many impossible irrationalities which moderates attempt to maintain in order to distance themselves from those they disparage as hyper-Calvinists.”¹⁸ Hunt goes on to point out “MacArthur, Packer, Piper, and others say that God desires the salvation of all yet doesn’t decree it.”¹⁹ In other words God desires the salvation of all, yet predetermines most for eternity in hell.

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John Piper wants to be able to claim both sides of the issue, “We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross *in some sense*.... What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ *in the same way*. All of God’s mercy towards unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross.... Every time the gospel is preached to unbelievers it is the mercy of God that gives this opportunity for salvation”²⁰ [emphasis in the original].

John Piper explains that God has two wills: “Therefore I affirm with John 3:16 and 1 Timothy that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin. Since not all people are saved we must choose whether we believe (with the Arminians) that God’s will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to human self-determination or whether we believe (with the Calvinists) that God’s will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to the glorification of his sovereign grace (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; Romans 9:22-23) This book aims to show that the sovereignty of God’s grace in salvation is taught in Scripture. My contribution has simply been to show that God’s will for all people to be saved is not at odds with the sovereignty of God’s grace in election. That is my answer to the question about what restrains God’s will to save all people in his supreme commitment to uphold and display the full range of his glory through the sovereign demonstration of his wrath and mercy for the enjoyment of his elect and believing people from every tribe and tongue and nation.”²¹

Hunt points out, “Piper goes to great lengths to ‘show from Scripture that the simultaneous existence of God’s will for ‘all persons to be saved’ (1 Timothy 2:4) and his will to elect unconditionally those who will actually be saved is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion,”²²

False Faith

Martin Luther tells us God is “*deservedly taunting and mocking*” the lost to come to Christ when they can’t because he [God] refuses to save them.²³

This is bad enough yet John Calvin carries it even farther by claiming God gives *true faith* to some and *false faith* to others:

“Enlightening some with a present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent”²⁴

“There is nothing to prevent his [God’s] giving some a slight knowledge of his gospel, and imbuing others thoroughly...the light which glimmers in the reprobate is afterwards quenched...”²⁵

“Experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way similar to the elect, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them... Not that they truly perceive the power of spiritual grace and the sure light of faith; but the Lord the better to convict them, and leave them without excuse, instills into their minds such a sense of his goodness as can be felt without the Spirit of adoption.

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Still...the reprobate believe God to be propitiation to them, inasmuch as they accept the gift of reconciliation, though confusedly and without due discernment.... Nor do I even deny that God illumines their minds to this extent, as they recognize his grace; but that conviction he distinguishes from the particular testimony which he gives to his elect in this respect, that the reprobate never obtain to the full result or to fruition. When he shows himself propitious to them, it is not as if he truly rescued them from death, and taken them under his protection. He only gives them a manifestation of his present mercy. In the elect alone he implants the living root of faith, so that they persevere even to the end.”²⁶

“...Calvin explained in his teaching that some are predestined to salvation and others to destruction was “*the only sure ground of confidence that only the elect possess.*”²⁸

Having two wills and giving false salvation to the lost makes God a liar and a deceiver. But we know this is not the case:

...it is impossible for God to lie. **Hebrews 6:18**

[the devil is] “*...the father of lies.*” **John 8:44**

Calvin is saying then that knowing God predestines some for heaven and some for hell is the only thing we can know about election. There is no assurance where one stands.

With *false faith* in the equation the Calvinist is left with nothing but *hoping* their works prove to themselves that they are one of the elect. Surely God wouldn't give false faith to someone zealously working for the kingdom and God's glory, would He? Well, if predestining some for hell is part of God exercising His sovereignty and range of glory, why not?

As demonstrated above, uncertainty of salvation is common among Calvinists and shows they can't know if they've been given a false sense of salvation or not. A pastor I know asked the question towards the end of his sermon on Ephesians 1:3-17 and election and predestination, "How can I know if I am elect?" His answer was, "The fact that the question deeply concerns you is evidence that you are."

On the surface that sounds comforting. Who isn't concerned about this, especially for Calvinists, because according to them election is predetermined.

But then you have to wonder, are Jehovah Witnesses *deeply concerned* whether they are one of the 144,000? Muslim's must be *deeply concerned* if they are the chosen of Allah which is why they are willing to die a martyr's death which in Islam is the only sure way to know. Are Mormons ever *deeply concerned* that Joseph Smith got it right? Maybe a Hindu is *deeply concerned* about Pantheism. I imagine even atheists at times are *deeply concerned* that their conclusion that "there is no God" is correct. Obviously that the question of whether or not you are one of the elect "*deeply concerns*" you is no assurance of salvation.

Similarly, as I pointed out above, R.C. Sproul seemed to doubt his salvation at one time. Continuing on from where I left off above Sproul went on to say:

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“...I could not be sure about my own heart and motivation. Then I remembered John 6:68. Jesus had been giving out hard teaching, and many of His former followers had left Him. When He asked Peter if he was also going to leave, Peter said, "Where else can I go? Only you have the words of eternal life." In other words, Peter was also uncomfortable, but he realized that being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option.”²⁸

Sproul isn't sure about his salvation, but thinks being “*uncomfortable*” with Jesus is as good as it gets. Sproul is wrong, Peter is in no way saying “Where else can I go?” from a viewpoint of doubt or hopelessness. Sproul missed the mark entirely; Peter is expressing *confidence*, not an uncomfortableness with the options available to him. Contrary to Sproul's assertion, Peter was proclaiming his confidence as he continues in the next verse:

“*We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*” **John 6:69**

Peter *believed* and *knew*. He was confident. “Deeply concerned” and “uncomfortable with Jesus”, what kind of assurance is that? What a pity that Calvinists don't know if they are one of the elect and must rely on being deeply concerned and uncomfortable.

As difficult and convoluted as Reformed Theology makes the Gospel and assurance of salvation, Dwight L. Moody puts it in proper perspective, "*It is a masterpiece of the devil to make us believe that children cannot understand religion. Would Christ have made a child the standard of faith if He had known that it was not capable of understanding His words?*"

If a child can understand salvation, everyone is able to as well, after all God is not the author of confusion. The Calvinist has it backwards, he says you are elected, then you have salvation, and then you believe in Jesus. The simple truth is, if you accept Jesus you have salvation making you one of the elect.

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