

A DEFENSE OF CALVINISM

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It is a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have received twenty 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, trumpery 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 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 toward the doctrine of free-will. I can only say that mine inclines as naturally toward 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 should have been! I should have run to the utmost lengths of sin, dived into the very depths of evil, nor should I have stopped at any vice or folly, if God had not restrained me. I feel that I should 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 not at this moment without 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.

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. Wooings were lost upon me, warnings were cast to the wind, thunders were despised. And 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 o'erflow."*

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 myself, 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, burned into my heart as with a hot iron--and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man, that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God.

One weeknight 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 should 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. 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."

Let me ask, must we not all of us admit an over-ruling Providence and the appointment of Jehovah's hand as to the means whereby we came into this world? Those men who think that, afterward, 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 Hottentot, brought forth by a filthy mother who would nurse me in her "kraal" 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 knee in prayer on my behalf? Or, might He not, if He had pleased, have given me some profligate 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 should have had a drunken father, who would have immured 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 afterward." 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 should never have chosen Him. And I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterward. 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.

Then, in the fulness of time, He purchased me with His blood. He let His heart run out in one deep gaping wound for me long ere I loved Him. Yea, 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? 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." Then He turned my heart and made me love Him. But even till now I should have resisted Him, had it not been for His grace. Well, then, since He purchased me when I was dead in sins, does it not follow as a consequence necessary and logical 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 myself 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 man 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 should 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, 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 wrought out upon the cross. Nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers 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 be 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 master-mind. 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, nor can earth or hell alter it.

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. 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 should 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 on 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 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 must be 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.

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 already. Think of the countless hosts in Heaven. If you were introduced there today, you would find it as easy to tell the stars, or the sands of the sea, as to count the multitudes that are before the throne even now.

The Father's love is not for a few only, but for an exceeding great

company. "A great multitude, which no man could number," will be found in Heaven. 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. 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!

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement. They say, "It is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men. It commends itself 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 falsehood. There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involved.

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 be 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 was 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 afterward punished the sinners themselves, 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 afterward 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 the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good!

The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and 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 who hears say, Come. And let him who is athirst come. And whosoever will, 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."

In one place I see 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 should be driven very near to atheism. And if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so over-rules all things that man is not free enough to be responsible, I should be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism.

That God predestines and yet that man is responsible are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory, but they are not. The fault is in our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, *that is true*. And if I find in another Scripture that man is responsible for all his actions, *that is true*, and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths 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 will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God whence all truth does 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, 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.

No doctrine is so calculated to preserve a man from sin as the doctrine of the grace of God. 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. Of all men, those have the most disinterested piety, the sublimest 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.