THE ROOTED WAY • EPISODE 14

CALVINISM

Sovereignty, Election & the Grace of God

SOTERIOLOGY SERIES • PART 1

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." — John 6:44, NASB

EPISODE STUDY & SHOW NOTES

Designed for listening, personal study, small-group discussion, and use inside Rooted Word.

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Episode Overview

KEY QUESTION	What does Calvinism teach about how God saves sinners, and how does it understand the relationship between God's sovereignty, election, grace, and human responsibility?
BIG IDEA	Calvinism emphasizes God's sovereign initiative throughout salvation. Fallen humanity cannot come to God apart from His grace; God elects according to His sovereign purpose; Christ secures redemption for His people; God effectually calls the elect; and those whom He truly saves will ultimately persevere.
PRIMARY PASSAGES	Ephesians 2:1–5; Ephesians 1:3–6; Romans 9:14–18; John 6:37–44; John 10:27–29
SUPPORTING PASSAGES	Romans 3:10–12; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 1:21; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:28–39; John 17:9; Hebrews 9:28; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Philippians 1:6

Why This Matters

Calvinism is often discussed through slogans, assumptions, or caricatures. But the doctrines represented by TULIP address substantial biblical questions about the depth of sin, election, the atonement, the work of grace, perseverance, evangelism, assurance, and human responsibility.

- How deeply has sin affected humanity?
- Why does one person believe while another does not?
- What does Scripture mean by election?
- For whom did Christ die?
- Can God's saving call ultimately be resisted?
- Can someone who has truly been saved finally fall away?

KEY DISTINCTION	**Calvinism does not teach that people are robots who never make choices. It teaches that fallen people make real choices according to their desires while God remains sovereign over salvation.**

1. What Is Calvinism?

Calvinism belongs to the broader Reformed tradition associated particularly with John Calvin and other Protestant Reformers. The familiar five points summarized by TULIP became a later shorthand for the Reformed response to controversies over election, grace, and human freedom.

- T — Total Depravity
- U — Unconditional Election
- L — Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption
- I — Irresistible Grace
- P — Perseverance of the Saints

A USEFUL REMINDER	**TULIP summarizes one part of Reformed theology. Calvinism is broader than five doctrines about salvation.**

2. Total Depravity

READ

Ephesians 2:1–5; Romans 3:10–12; Romans 8:7–8; Jeremiah 17:9

UNDERSTAND

Total depravity does not mean that every person is as evil as he could possibly become. It means that sin has affected the whole person: mind, desires, will, affections, body, and relationship with God.

Paul describes fallen humanity as spiritually dead in sin and naturally hostile toward God. The Calvinist conclusion is that humanity's problem is deeper than simply needing better information. Apart from God's gracious intervention, the sinner will not come to God savingly.

KEY LINE	**Total depravity says our greatest problem is not that we need help becoming better people. We need God to give life to people who are spiritually dead.**

ASK

When Scripture says we are "dead" in sin, what kind of inability does that describe? Does spiritual death necessarily mean a sinner cannot respond to God's own gracious revelation unless God first regenerates him?

3. Unconditional Election

READ

Ephesians 1:3–6; Romans 9:10–18; Romans 8:28–30

UNDERSTAND

Calvinism teaches that before the foundation of the world, God sovereignly chose particular people for salvation. His choice was not based upon foreseen faith, human goodness, future obedience, merit, or anything God discovered within the person.

In this understanding, God does not choose someone because He foresees that the person will eventually believe. The person eventually believes because God graciously elected, called, and changed him.

KEY DISTINCTION	**The Calvinist order is not "God sees who will choose Him, so He chooses them." It is "God chooses according to His sovereign purpose, and His saving work brings the elect to faith."**

ASK

When Paul speaks of election and predestination, is he describing God's unconditional selection of particular individuals for salvation, or are some election passages addressing other purposes, groups, or covenant roles?

4. Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption

READ

John 10:11; Matthew 1:21; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:32–34; John 17:9; Hebrews 9:28

UNDERSTAND

This is often the most controversial point of TULIP. "Limited Atonement" does not ordinarily mean Calvinists believe Christ's sacrifice lacks sufficient value to save every person. The argument concerns Christ's intent in the atonement.

Calvinism teaches that Christ died with the specific purpose of actually securing the redemption of God's elect. For that reason, many Calvinists prefer the term "Particular Redemption." Christ did not merely make salvation theoretically possible; He actually accomplished redemption for His people.

KEY DISTINCTION	**The disagreement is not primarily about the value of Christ's blood. The disagreement is about the intended extent of Christ's atoning work.**

ASK

When Scripture says Christ laid down His life for His sheep, His people, His church, and "the many," does that language exclude a genuine atoning provision for everyone else? Or can Scripture emphasize Christ's particular relationship to His people without limiting the availability of His atonement?

5. Irresistible Grace

READ

John 6:37; John 6:44; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Romans 8:30

UNDERSTAND

The phrase "Irresistible Grace" can be misunderstood. Calvinists do not generally mean that people never resist God. The doctrine refers more specifically to God's effectual saving call.

Calvinism distinguishes between the general call of the gospel, which goes broadly to people who are commanded to repent and believe, and the effectual call, in which God inwardly changes the heart of the elect so that the person willingly comes to Christ.

KEY LINE	**Irresistible grace does not mean God drags unwilling people into heaven. It means God changes the heart so that the person willingly comes.**

6. Perseverance of the Saints

READ

John 10:27–29; Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:31–39

UNDERSTAND

Calvinism teaches that those whom God genuinely regenerates will ultimately persevere in faith because God Himself preserves them. This does not mean Christians never sin, doubt, struggle, wander, or require discipline. It means genuine salvation will not ultimately be lost.

KEY LINE	**The perseverance of the saints ultimately depends upon the preserving power of God.**

7. Does Calvinism Eliminate Free Will?

One of the most common misunderstandings of Calvinism is: "If God predestines everything, humans do not make real choices." Most Calvinists would reject that description. They commonly hold some form of compatibilism.

Compatibilism says God's sovereignty and meaningful human choices can both be true. People genuinely choose according to what they want. The question is whether a person must possess the genuine ability to choose otherwise for that choice to be morally free.

KEY DISTINCTION	**A Calvinist generally defines freedom as acting voluntarily according to your desires without being externally forced against your will. Libertarian freedom asks whether, under the same circumstances, the person could genuinely have chosen otherwise.**

8. What About Scripture's Calls to Respond?

READ

Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:19; Luke 9:23; Acts 2:38; Acts 16:31; John 5:39–40; 2 Corinthians 5:20

Throughout the New Testament, God repeatedly addresses people with commands: repent, believe, come, follow, take up your cross, be reconciled, and obey. Jesus does not merely describe what will happen; He calls people to respond.

THE QUESTION

If fallen humanity possesses no saving ability unless God first effectually changes the heart, what is the relationship between these genuine commands and the person hearing them?

The Calvinist answer is that God commands what humanity is morally obligated to do even though sin has left mankind unwilling to do it. God then uses the preaching of the gospel as one of the means through which He effectually calls His elect.

ASK	**Is the ability to respond genuinely available to everyone receiving the command, or is the saving response ultimately possible only for those whom God has chosen to effectually call?**

9. If God Predestines the End, Why Do Anything?

Another common question is: If I am predestined to salvation, why does obedience matter? Calvinism has a direct answer: God does not merely ordain the final destination of His people. He also ordains the means through which He brings them there.

- gospel proclamation
- repentance
- faith
- sanctification
- correction
- discipline
- obedience
- perseverance

READ

Romans 6:1–2

Paul directly rejects the idea that grace provides an excuse to continue living in sin. Grace does not make obedience unnecessary. Saving grace produces a transformed relationship with sin.

KEY LINE	**Being saved by grace does not mean sin no longer matters. Paul explicitly rejects turning grace into permission for rebellion.**

10. A Question That Remains

The Calvinist answer is coherent: God ordains both the end and the means. But another question remains: if God ultimately determines the desires and circumstances from which a person's response necessarily follows, in what meaningful sense could that person have responded differently?

The Calvinist answer is that responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise. A person is responsible because he acted according to his own desires. Other Christians argue that genuine moral responsibility does require a real alternative. That difference will become important as we continue this conversation.

Apply

- Let the doctrine of grace destroy boasting. Whatever view of election we ultimately hold, no Christian can stand before God claiming to have earned salvation.
- Take sin seriously. Grace is never permission for rebellion.
- Take the gospel seriously. Scripture commands the church to proclaim Christ and calls people everywhere to repent and believe.
- Let Scripture challenge your system. Do not force difficult passages into a theological framework simply because the framework is familiar.
- Keep Christ at the center. The point of studying salvation is not winning theological arguments; it is knowing more clearly the God who saves.

Reflection

- When you think about salvation, do you instinctively emphasize God's sovereignty or human responsibility?
- Which point of TULIP seems strongest to you biblically?
- Which point raises the most questions?
- How do you understand the repeated biblical commands to repent, believe, and follow Christ?
- Does moral responsibility require the genuine ability to choose otherwise?
- Have you ever used grace, election, or eternal security as an excuse to take sin less seriously?
- Are you willing to allow Scripture to correct your theological system rather than using your system to explain away Scripture?

Closing Takeaway

> *Calvinism seeks to emphasize a deeply biblical truth: salvation belongs to God, begins with His grace, rests upon His mercy, and leaves humanity no grounds for boasting.*

The continuing question is how God's sovereign saving work relates to Scripture's equally serious commands for people to repent, believe, follow Christ, obey, and persevere.

Pray

Father,

Thank You for the grace You have shown us in Jesus Christ. Keep us humble as we study difficult doctrines. Protect us from pride, from defending theological labels more fiercely than Your Word, and from caricaturing brothers and sisters who understand these passages differently.

Help us understand rightly what Scripture teaches about Your sovereignty, our sin, election, grace, faith, and perseverance. Where our theology is wrong, correct us. Where our hearts are proud, humble us. And wherever these discussions lead, keep Jesus Christ and the gospel at the center.

Amen.

Further Scripture

Human Sinfulness & Inability

Ephesians 2:1–5 • Romans 3:9–18 • Romans 8:5–8 • 1 Corinthians 2:14 • Jeremiah 17:9

Election & Predestination

Ephesians 1:3–14 • Romans 8:28–30 • Romans 9:6–24 • John 15:16

Christ's Atoning Work

John 10:11–30 • Matthew 1:21 • Acts 20:28 • Romans 8:31–34 • John 17:1–26 • Hebrews 9:24–28

Effectual Calling

John 6:35–45 • Ezekiel 36:22–28 • Romans 8:28–30 • Acts 13:44–48

Perseverance

John 10:27–30 • Philippians 1:6 • Romans 8:31–39 • 1 Peter 1:3–5

Calls to Respond

Mark 1:14–15 • Matthew 4:18–22 • Luke 9:23–24 • Acts 2:37–41 • Acts 16:25–34 • John 5:39–40 • 2 Corinthians 5:17–21

Listen & Continue

Podcast: The Rooted Way — Calvinism: Sovereignty, Election & the Grace of God

Episode resources: rootedtruthministries.org/podcasts

Rooted Word Bible study app: rootedtruthministries.org/rooted-word

NEXT IN THE SERIES	**Arminianism & Provisionism**

In the next episode, we continue the conversation by examining two alternative ways Christians have understood God's grace, human ability, election, atonement, and the response of faith. We'll ask where Arminianism and Provisionism agree with Calvinism, where they differ, and what Scriptures each view uses to build its case.

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