

Transcript 187

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today, we're going to be starting a new series by request. This is something that we get a ton of questions about. It's something I've received suggestions about in terms of what we could do, some podcast episodes on. And this is something that you and Jeff, Kevin and I have talked about doing a series on and that is what is Calvinism. So today we're going to be kind of doing an intro to the series in terms of helping people to understand what exactly it is. And then we're doing more episodes going through the five points of Calvinism. And then kind of a practical episode is OK what are the implications of what you believe about these issues? These, these things are important. I mean, the purpose of Got Questions is not to promote Calvinism, even though we describe ourselves as moderately Calvinistic. But some of these issues have implications beyond like the specific points themselves. If you reject this specific point that has an impact on how you view other things as well so. We believe Calvinism is important, but at the same time we do not, we are not a Calvinistic ministry. And since promoting Calvinism is what not what we do, it's not our hearts desire. It's not something we want to spend a whole lot of time arguing about. There are members of the staff with varying points of agreement, with Calvinism. Even among the three of us, there's various, varying points and how much we agree with how many of the five points or even the system as a whole. So hope you hear that that we think these things are important. We believe that Calvinism is closer to the truth than Arminianism, but by no means do we believe Calvinism is a perfect theological system.

Shea Houdmann

So ultimately, when most people think of Calvinism, they're thinking of the issue of how does God's sovereignty and salvation work alongside human responsibility or human free will. The Bible teaches both of those, and we'll be going through those and describing the Bible says here that God elects some to salvation. God says here that he invites people to be saved by choosing Christ. One of the most interesting things about Calvinism that we've experienced at Got Questions is some people are very surprised when they discover that we are moderately Calvinistic. I think our official viewpoint is 4 point Calvinism, which some people say is isn't logically coherent anyways. But those are the four points that we'll go through that we actually believe are biblically solid. So you hear all this Got Questions has suddenly become Calvinistic. And it's like no for basically our entire 22 year history we believe that Calvinism is far closer to the truth than Arminianism. Or people who say that we've become more Calvinistic or why in this issue do you promote Calvinism so strongly? Well if it's an issue, the question about is God sovereign and salvation? Does God, what is predestination mean? The way we answer those questions we are going to answer them similarly to how a full Calvinist would answer those. But, in all that we do not believe Calvinism versus Arminianism is something worth dividing over. We do not believe that Calvinism is a, again, a perfect system. But what ultimate goal, what we found in a lot of people who asked us questions about this, they truly don't understand what Calvinism is and what Arminianism is and is, and how and how they're different. That's really what we want to accomplish in this. So start off, Kevin, why is Calvinism important? I think that's a really good place for us to start.

Kevin Stone

Yeah. And I think that is a very good question. Why is it important? Why is the debate surrounding Calvinism an important one? There are. There is a lot of debate about it, a lot of discussion, and has been going on for centuries. Is that Much Ado about nothing, or is there really some substantive issues here? And I believe I believe that it is an important discussion to have, a necessary one to have. The two systems of thought because, well, I'm thinking of Calvinism and Arminianism. That's usually how the contrast is put forward. Those two systems of thought are really kind of lead to different world views. They're both Christian worldviews, but just different views of God's involvement and some of the meaning of the theological terms that we use. And it's it's it's an important it's an important debate. But I think that Calvinism is important for for several reasons.

Kevin Stone

One is it deals with several very important issues that really get to the heart of our spiritual life. So, for example, Calvinism deals with the basic nature of salvation. And how exactly does God save people? What does it mean to be saved? And how long does salvation last? Is it a temporary thing that God save someone, or does that work of salvation continue despite our ups and downs? Also Calvinism deals with the nature of the sovereignty of God. What does it mean that God is sovereign? To what extent is he sovereign? Are there areas of the human experience in which God kind of takes a hands off approach and says I'll leave the choice to you, and all be good with whatever you choose. How and how does that fit in with the idea that God is sovereign in Scripture? Calvinism deals with the nature of faith. Where does faith come from? Is faith something that I gin up myself? Is it a gift from God? Can we choose to have faith in Christ without his help? Or how much help do we need? Those kind of questions are being asked and answered in Calvinism. Also the nature of grace. Is grace really necessary? Is it true that grace is totally undeserved, or is there something that I can do to to merit? Can I? Can I meet God halfway and receive grace somehow, you know, bring the grace to me? And in the nature of the gospel and the work of Christ, what did Jesus accomplish on the cross? What was the atonement all about? What did he atone for? Whom did he atone? And the this is a very important question.

Kevin Stone

Charles Spurgeon, he was very clear on his position in all of this. In fact, he wrote a piece called a defense of Calvinism. And in this, Spurgeon said, quote, there's 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. End of quote. So we know where Spurgeon stood. The theological system of Calvinism was a biblical system and really just a presentation of the of the gospel as presented in the Bible. So that's one reason why I think Calvinism is important.

Kevin Stone

A few other reasons are, that the study of Calvinism forces believers to really get back to the Bible and take a look at what the Bible says concerning salvation, the gospel, the work of Christ, the nature of faith. If you're talking to a Calvinist it's not enough to say, well, I feel like this is true or or I I had a dream, God told me in a dream last night that this was true or anything like that. Calvinist really. Most Calvinists really dig into the word and they really want to understand what the scripture says about these various issues. What does this sentence say? What does this sentence mean? And that's a good thing to delve into the scriptures and really study it out. And Calvinism is, is a system that really promotes that type of an approach.

Kevin Stone

Also, there's been a resurgence of Calvinism in recent times. You hear about the new Calvinists. And this is a really interesting movement because it spans denominations. You got churches that you would never normally think of as being Calvinistic that are now espousing Calvinism, or at least they have a group within them that is saying, hey, let's get back to the doctrines of grace. Let's start taking a look at these five points again.

Kevin Stone

Another reason why Calvinism is important, and why the study of it is important, is that Calvinism can actually be divisive. There are two forms of Baptist theology that came out of these separatist movement back in the 1600s in England. And it wasn't really a split, just two different streams of Baptist theology that came out of separatism. And one was the General Baptist. They were Armenian. And then the particular Baptists which were Calvinistic into just different branches, different ways of taking a look at what Scripture says. And that particular division has continued even to today. So it's it can be a divisive issue and it's another reason why we we should take a look at the debate and understand what Calvinism is.

Jeff Laird

I like the idea of understanding it carefully because it can be divisive. And one of the things I found is that with a lot of topics, not just Calvinism, but when you actually ask people to sit down and define, what do you think? What do you mean? How do you approach this? You actually find out that there's not as much different in what people are thinking, but there are some points where it's a little trickier for people to wrap their heads around. And this controversy over Calvinism goes, quite literally, all the way back to its origins. And Calvinism was one of the things that came out of the Reformation. And that was a time when there was a lot of contention between Catholicism and the new protestant groups. And you can see some of that reflected in some of the things that Calvinism says. If you were to take sort of a simplified version of Catholicism, then in a sense, Calvinism is almost that just turned on its head where it says, you know, instead of it's up to you to do these rituals and these sacraments. No. God is 100% responsible. Instead about being about working with the church, no, it's just about God. You can lose your salvation if you don't do the right things. No, you can't do that. And so on and so forth. So there was, there was contention from the very get go.

Jeff Laird

There's also the fact that anytime you have any theological system that's got somebody's name attached to it, there's going to be people who will attack the person who came up with it or for whom it was named. They're going to have flaws, and the reformers have flaws. Luther and Calvin, there's moments in their history. There's things they've said, things they've written, things they've done that are awkward at best, or just condemnable at the worst. And that's something that people sometimes have a hard time separating is the difference between the the flaws of somebody who was involved in the system being established versus the others. The doctrinal side of Calvinism, there's some controversies on there and it's it's some people will criticize the fact that the way we think of these doctrines was not something that was really expressed in a formal way until the Reformation. But that's not necessarily a good criticism because there's a lot of things in the world that we develop our understanding of, that we

refine our ability to understand over time. So the question is not really how old is it, it's how accurate it is.

Jeff Laird

And there's five main points of Calvinism that we'll you'll, I'm sure we'll get into a specific episode of each when we get there, but in brief they involve an acronym that we use which is Tulip. And each of those there's some points that people don't like. One of those is the idea of total depravity. That's controversial because people suggest the idea that what does it mean that that we are made in the image of God. But you're saying that we are so evil, so depraved, so wicked, that we're not even capable of wanting to be with God. How does that square with my experience? That's something that people struggle with.

Jeff Laird

There's unconditional election. This is the idea that God is the one who chooses which people come to salvation and others don't. Right on the face of it, there's controversy there. What is God's role in this? Where? Where is my choice? Where is my free will? Why am I being, quote on quote, punished for something that I supposedly have no control over? Now obviously there's responses and answers, but this is where the controversy comes from.

Jeff Laird

Limited atonement is another one that there's controversy on, and that's basically the question of when Jesus died on the cross did his death pay for the sins of only those who will come to faith. Or did it pay a sufficient price for every single human being everywhere? And that one gets a lot of back and forth, especially theological circles.

Jeff Laird

There's irresistible grace. This is the idea that when God elects, that is an absolutely irrevocable and irresistible calling. That is very much like unlimited atonement. It's questions about free will.

Jeff Laird

Then you have perseverance of the Saints or what some people call once saved, always saved. And that is the one point where many people who don't identify as Calvinists would support. Which is this idea of eternal security. But that is also controversial because people say they're again, what about people who do this, who do that? You're telling me that no matter what a person does, that they're go to heaven as long as they say that they believe in Jesus. And there's cartoons and there's caricatures of what that means. But each of the different doctrines is controversial. And the the basic core of them is the question of does God let us make decisions for ourselves, or does God make decisions for us? And in which places does he take control? And in which places does he allow us to make our own decisions? And then what does that mean about him? And like Kevin was saying, those have implications. Those mean something for how we look at things like theology, it affects how we do things, it affects how we worship, how we interpret the Bible, how we work with other people, and it can lead to some practical problems, which I'm sure we'll get into as we go, because the practical issues typically are not explicitly tied to Calvinism in and of itself, but they are dangers that it can lead to.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, I mean, you hit the nail on the head. With in my observation and this again this comes from the 22 of leading Got Questions Ministries and seeing literally thousands of questions coming in related to these issues, most people who reject Calvinism do so partly from a poor understanding, but also from a resistance to the idea that they're not in control. The fact that God makes some decisions over which they do not have a full say. And that's, that's the rub. That's what causes the people to reject it. But you search the scriptures, there are clearly versus to talk about God's predestined and God choosing people before the foundation of world, God's electing some to salvation. So the degree to which we have a choice and God has a choice, we can debate that. And that's a lot of what the debate is about. But to say salvation is 100% your choice? That's that's what a lot of people want to be able to say. And yet scripture definitely indicates God has a choice in the matter as well, and that's where the debate comes from.

Shea Houdmann

I can describe many different conversations I've had with people who love Got Questions, and like I said at the beginning, find out that we've become Calvinists or shocker Got questions supports Calvinism. And just having a conversation with them like, hey, tell me what, like what, what are the issues? Well, that means you believe that there's no free will. That we're basically just robots doing what we're programmed to do. It's like, I don't believe that at all. And while I some people who take Calvinism to an extreme, I think that's the logical outcome of what they believe. But I've never even met a full Calvinist who actually believes that. So I usually will go through OK do you believe that we are so completely impacted by sin that we can't even believe without God doing they were? Because look at like John 6:44. It says no one can come to fake to Christ unless God draws him or her. Yes, I I believe that. Well, do you believe in election predestination? And here's some verses to talk about. Well, yes. I believe that somehow in the mystery of God, God chooses who will be saved. Or do you believe that the salvation that Christ has provided is so perfect, so complete, that we couldn't, there's nothing we could possibly do to lose it. Like, yes, I believe. I'm like congratulations. You're on you're on your way to being a 3 point Calvinist. And they're like what? No, no, no, I'm. I'm not. I I don't really believe in any. It's like, OK, just I want you to understand like Calvinism is not some horrible, evil, boogeyman that takes away any responsibility, that means we're robots. That means we just sit around and don't do anything because we're trusting that God's going to save people without us sharing the gospel. Like all those are caricatures.

Shea Houdmann

But what we want to accomplish with this series help you to understand colorism not in the sense that we want everyone to become Calvinists like no, we want people to understand Calvinism specifically as it relates to salvation because we think these issues are important. And we have absolutely no problem believing that Calvinists of various point levels are saved. Armenians you can believe in full Arminianism and be saved. As much as we disagree with some of the points of Arminianism, for large part, this is not a salvation issue, but it does impact how we understand salvation, and that's very important. There's no getting away from that since Calvinism deals with salvation, how people are saved, how God provided salvation. That makes us a very important issue worth at least understanding the issues accurately.

Kevin Stone

The church where I pastor has kind of a mix of people on the spectrum. I've got some that and I think probably all churches do right, have some that lean more toward the Armenian point of view and some that learn more toward the Calvinistic point of view. And I know that in my preaching I probably drive both groups crazy. When I'm preaching on whosoever will, you know, make your choice to follow Christ today. All my Armenian leaning people are saying Amen. Amen. Preach it. And then you know the next week when I'm preaching from Ephesians one and I'm talking about predestination and the sovereignty of God, all the Calvinistic leaning people are saying Amen. Amen. And the other groups going and scratching their heads and saying what? What's this? Where is this coming from? And I know that the issues are there because of both groups have people from both groups have come and talk to me afterwards, you know, can you explain this further stuff like this? And so, you know it is what it is. Scripture teaches both that God is sovereign and man has a free will to some extent. And we need to be extending the invitation to come to Christ. We also need to understand that God is sovereign and it's all, it's all just part of it.

Kevin Stone

I was, my church that I used to attend, this was years and years ago that we had a 5 of one of my friends was a 5 pointer, you know, five point Calvinist. And he came to me one day and said how long will ye halt between two opinions. And so I mean he's alluding to the biblical story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, talking to the people of Israel, saying you guys are on the fence between either Bale worship or Yahweh worship. You need to get off the fence and make your choice and so, but he applied that to my position of, you know, wanting to appeal to people's free will at the same time, believe in God's sovereignty. And but I didn't I thought that was a little bit unfair. You know, I'm not trying to reconcile idolatry with true worship. I simply trying to take all of Scripture together and trying to work things out that way. But my friend there the five pointer he might have been more along the lines of the caricature of the Calvinist that sometimes we run into.

Jeff Laird

The caricatures are an issue and the part of the problem is that there are going to sometimes be people who will meet those caricatures. I mean, for every time we point to something and we say yes, people sometimes say I don't like Christians who are this and that we can point to things in Scripture that show that that's not how Christians are supposed to be. But the fact remains there are people who identify as believers who will say and do those things. One of the things I've seen is the Calvinism sometimes has a tendency to be a little bit, choosing my words carefully, sports team like where there's a very, very potent sense of almost patriotism and pride and defense of being in that camp. There's there's a lot of writers that I really like and I really respect who I think have very good information on a lot of topics that sometimes are just unreasonably antagonistic towards anything that is not fully and completely Calvinist. To the extent that it's it's like Calvinism starts to become a doctrine that is part of their you know, concept of what it means to be a Christian. And that's kind of a rough spot because as we've said, some of these things are very behind the scenes. Some of the things that we're talking about really are just questions of us trying to understand how God does things in his mind and in his sense. We're never going to fully understand those. And the nice thing is, is that we don't have to. I make the point all the time that I don't know, very many people who are electrical engineers, let alone physicists, let alone quantum mechanics experts. But they all know how to use light switches and flashlights and so on and so forth. The things that we really need to know and understand, God makes obvious enough in the

Bible that we are able to do it. And that's why I think it's good that we're going to take the time to explore all these different ideas and bring them up. Because I think we can respect what's good and true and useful about them, and we can also recognize the things that we need to be careful of that to the point you were saying, Kevin, there are people with different perspectives on those I've been working with Got Questions for I think 20 years now, and I've never been bothered by the the Calvinism, because I don't see anything in Calvinism that I would look at and say no, that's just flat out wrong. That's just so incorrect that I don't want to be associated with it. At the same time, I don't identify myself as at any point Calvinist, and that's that's more just, you know, for nitpicking sake. I'm more of what we would call a molinist, and we've done a podcast on that, if people are curious as to what that means. But that's where we get into options where people say maybe I can have free will and I can have predestination. But instead of being tribal about it, the important thing is that when we really sit down and talk about it, you really find out that there is very broad agreement on who God is, who we are, what our responsibilities are. Where it becomes important really is in the finer details. So I think for me, that's where the Calvinism, Arminianism, predestination type debates get interesting is because it's the way it influences our sort of deeper theology, the way that we we now interpret things and then make more decisions going forward.

Shea Houdmann

Well, so Jeff, I like your illustration of the light bulb, the light switch, the flashlight. When the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul in Acts 16. Is it, Sir? What must I do to be saved? Paul doesn't go into any of these issues that we're talking about. He says believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. And obviously, we fully believe that Paul explained more than the specifically recorded in that passage. But that's what it is. What was going on behind the scenes and it describes a Philippian jailer believing. OK, well, how much transformative work did God have to do before that Philippian jailer believed? That's the question about Calvinism. Or was that faith predestined before the foundation of the world? Did God predestine, based on foreseeing the faith of the Philippian jailer, or did the Philippian jailer believe because he was predestined? So those are the type issues we're talking about. But ultimately doesn't change the fact that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Jeff Laird

In the occasional time that I that I have debated with folks over Calvinism and I don't, typically because it's it is not something that's worth being divisive over, especially because most of it is is very useful and very good. But but occasionally my my sort of triggering response is to remind Calvinist that typical Calvinist evangelizes like an Armenian. So they'll convince they'll they'll give evidence, they'll give scripture they're they're talking to somebody as though it's their responsibility to give them information or something so that they can make a choice. And I know people are already typing on YouTube. This is gonna be up for 45 seconds and people are gonna be coming after me about that. Yes, I understand that that's not literally true. But the point is that in a practical sense, the way we actually interact with each other. There isn't this cataclysmic gulf between these different approaches. We we basically know how we need to do this and what we need to do.

Shea Houdmann

We're called to share the gospel, and I've heard Calvinists share the gospel. I've heard Armenians share the gospel. I've heard them share it exactly the same, perhaps in the invitation is where it maybe gets

the most difference. You can tell by how a person invites at the end, especially from the pulpit whether they're which perspective they're leaning towards or which one they hold. Ultimately, in terms of the facts of the gospel we still have 1st Corinthians 16 Jesus died for your sins according to your scriptures, was buried was raised after three days according to the Scriptures. That's what we believe. That's what we trust in, is the payment for our sins. And Calvinists and Armenians fully agree on that. So if we go through this series on, we'll touch on total depravity, the first of the five points in the next episode, we'll go through each of the points and we'll do an episode on the practical issues. Just want you to just remember what our heart is in this is. We think these issues are important. We're not saying they're just theoretical, but ultimately these are ones that we can agree to disagree on in terms of how exactly it's working behind the scenes. There's a section of it that I think all Christians do need to understand it. We at Got Questions, I think eternal security is very important. We think a denial of eternal security can lead to serious consequences and how you live your personal life, how you relate to God, your your peace, your joy as a Christian, those sorts of things. But we even believe you can deny eternal security and still be saved. So hear, hear our hearts in this and that we want you to understand these issues and thereby be able to make a fully informed decision, as you studied the scriptures, as you search the Scriptures about which view you believe is correct. So this is the Got Questions podcast on what is Calvinism? Introducing a series we're going to do on the five points. So hope our conversation today has been encouraging. Edifying to you. Thank you, Jeff. Thank you, Kevin, for joining me. I'm looking forward to our upcoming conversations. Got questions? The Bible as answers. We'll help you find them.