

Transcript 194

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Joining me today is Jeff, the managing editor of bibleref.com, and Kevin, the managing editor of gotquestions.org. And this is episode 7 in our series of what is Calvinism? And you may ask, how do you do 7 episodes on Calvinism when there's only five points? Well, episode one was kind of introduction. What, what, what is Calvinism in general? And then we discussed the five points and here we are at Episode 7 where we're going to be discussing some of the implications. So not maybe directly related to any of the specific five points, but how there's some misconceptions about Calvinism or even some implications of Calvinism that if you follow this to its logical conclusion, it seems to teach this.

Shea Houdmann

So we're going to be discussing today just kind of as a conclusion of the series in the sense of, yes, here's the five points. Here's the degrees to which we agree or disagree with each of the points, and that's even be different between Kevin, Jeff and I. But we want you to even understand some of the other questions we get about Calvinism. OK. If Calvinism is true, does that mean this? Those sorts of things. So hope this conversation is usually will be both interesting, educational and informative for you as it has meant for us as we've researched issues and discussed them and over 20 years of answering questions related to Calvinism. So Jeff, why don't you start us off. What are some of the implications of Calvinism that you've come across and maybe let's start off with in a positive sense, how does Calvinism help us to understand certain things about about God and salvation?

Jeff Laird

Some of the positive things that we see about Calvinism, probably the most positive, is the way it puts an emphasis on grace and God's sovereignty. And both of those are really

important to our understanding of the gospel. Grace, being that idea, that everything that happens to us that's positive is because God is simply choosing to do what he doesn't have to do. It also emphasizes his sovereignty, the idea that he's completely in control. It puts all of the credit for our salvation on God, and none of the credit for it on us. Those pretty much across the board I would say are biblically inarguable. Those are things that are not only things you cannot argue against in any sense, but they are really important. It also provides a framework. Sometimes it's handy just to have a system to be able to talk about something and to understand it. Even if you know in the background that parts of that system are not exactly perfectly right on the money.

Jeff Laird

It's sort of like in physics when we talk about atoms, we sometimes teach physics students to think of atoms with dots, with rings around them. Well, it's not even close to what an atom actually looks like. But for the purposes of understanding it, it's not a bad system. It's a good way to sort of categorize it and grasp it. It provides confidence in evangelism. Because it gives a person the chance to say, hey, I know that ultimately this is not really about me. And I think it also encourages people to dig deeper into faith. It gives them material and an attitude that says I can and should deeply understand these things. So even though a person like myself doesn't identify necessarily as a Calvinist, there is a lot of value in what Calvinism brings. It doesn't mean everything about it is fantastic or that there are no potential drawbacks or problems.

Kevin Stone

The sovereignty of God and the grace of God being emphasized in Calvinism are both very positive aspects of that framework. Myself being a four point Calvinist, I guess, kind of a partial Calvinist, I find great comfort in some of these points of Calvinism. I preach every Sunday and I have that privilege, and my my partial Calvinism really gives me comfort as I preach because like you said, Jeff, it's not about me and salvation belongs to the Lord. It's it's his business to change hearts. And so my responsibility is to present the word as plainly as I can.

To make it clear and understandable for people, make it accessible to people, and then God does the work. It's his Holy Spirit that has to change hearts. We see this in Acts chapter 16, as Paul is preaching to the women there gathered at the river in Philippi. And Scripture says that God opened Lydia's heart to receive the message of Paul and she was saved. Baptized right then and there. And. But it was the Lord's work in her heart. And, and so I take that in to every Sunday morning when I stand in the pulpit. This is gotta be God's work. I'm just here as a as a conduit for the the message. I'm here to open up the word and let the Holy Spirit do his work from there.

Kevin Stone

My partial Calvinism also prevents me from trying to control people, knowing again that I can't change people's hearts, that's God's business. And so I pray for people. I present the truth. I pray for them, I love them. I show them the the love of Christ. Try to model Christ for them. But I don't try to, I don't have to try to manipulate them. I don't have to wheedle or nag, you know? I just leave it up to the Lord to be changing hearts. And then Calvinism humbles me to think that a sinner such as I would be the recipient of God's mercy and his love to the extent that Jesus Christ, his own son, would die for me, that is, that is amazing grace. And just the just the thought of that keeps me looking to the author and finisher of my faith. It's all about Jesus and and glorifying him.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, I and Jeff, I agree. Me also being a a partial Calvinist like I joked that depending on how you define the terms, I can be anywhere between a one point and a four and a half point Calvinist. But if you will go back and watch the previous episodes I have issues with every point of Calvinism in terms of how specific most Calvinists like define the terms and describe them. I I'm not, I don't disagree entirely with the theology behind it. I'm just not sure, is that the only biblically plausible way to interpret those things? And for me, the one thing I would add to what you guys have shared is how Calvinism really focuses on what the Bible teaches. And I already

know the non Calvinist say anti Calvinists, you just heard me say that Calvin isn't biblical at all. It's like you can already that all you want but Calvinism behind each of the points there's a ton of scriptures who seem to argue for each of those truths. So again they can be debated as other ways of interpreting it. But Calvinism truly strives to build their theology on the clear teachings of scripture. I think that's a really good attitude for that. No matter where we come down on the issues of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, we have to do it on what the Bible teaches. And that's that's the whole goal of Got Questions, every question we answer we want to answer biblically, we want to present here's what the Bible teaches. When, it's in our slogans, in our mission statements. It's everywhere. And people say, why has Got Questions all about promoting Calvinism? Like we're not. But we're going to seek to interpret the Bible. If the Bible seems to point in a more Calvinistic direction than a more Armenian direction, that's the direction we're gonna go. But not because it's Calvinism, but because we think that's actually the best interpretation of the Bible. And so for me, Calvinism, in addition to giving God all the glory, focusing on God's grace, and keeping us humble, and also reminding us that it's not up to us. The biblical focus of Calvinism is a a powerful positive for me.

Kevin Stone

Yes. And I've I, I just wanna throw in here too that my 5 point friends of which I have several they are, they are serious students of the word. You know they they dig deep, they know their stuff. They know why they believe what they believe. And so when I am in discussions with my friends who are Calvinists, I have to really be on my toes. I have to know my stuff too. It drives me into the word and this is a good thing. This is an indirect blessing of Calvinism in my life. Makes me study harder. Makes me study longer. And and I I guess what scripture say? Iron sharpens iron. It's that type of thing.

Jeff Laird

And it is good when iron sharpens iron, as long as, as long as they're bumping into each other to sharpen each other and not trying to beat each other up. And that again can become

something that is not necessarily a criticism of Calvinism in and of itself, but sometimes the practical outworkings. Before we started, I know we were talking about the question of holding all the points, because now we're getting it talking about being a 1 point, 2 point, 3 point, 4 and a half, five point and so on and so forth. And there are people I know who asked the question do you have to accept all five or reject them? And if you have a chance to go through and look at, listen to the other discussions that we've had about this, we try to make the point that the points do interlock. They do inter relate to each other. But what that really means is that what you believe about each of them affects what you believe about the others. So in a sort of a shallow sense, you can say that if you believe in five point Calvinism, then you would believe that you either have to accept them all, or you have to reject them all. Just because of the way five point Calvinism itself interprets those different ideas.

Jeff Laird

However, theologically, if you're a 4 point, 3 point, whatever point you are going to have a slightly different perspective on what the different doctrines mean and in that sense you would not necessarily see some of those as necessary. All that just to say that, you know, Calvinism is not, it's not supposed to be a doctrinal shipper left. It's not supposed to be something that's a litmus test for legitimate faith. It's not an all or nothing, on or off kind of a thing. It's an idea. It's a concept, and it's got its good points and it's bad points. So there's no reason that a person says well, if I'm going to accept one, I have to accept them all. Or if I'm going to reject one, I have to reject them all.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent point, Jeff. The this since since you mentioned it, the bad points just to be fair to our non Calvinist brothers and sisters in Christ. There are some aspects to Calvinism that often that can result in negative attitudes, negative behaviors, even sinful patterns of of thought. And this is probably where we would get the most questions about, we're not very rarely do we get a question like like, what are some of the positive aspects of Calvinism? It's usually like OK.

If Calvin is miss true, then what about this? And I think the most frequent one we receive is if Calvinism is true, then there is no motivation for evangelism. If people are saved, they have to be regenerated before they even have faith. If God elects and only the elects come to have any true opportunity to come to salvation and they are inevitably going to come anyways, then what's the point of us sharing the gospel? Because literally I had a 5 point Calvinist tell me once that just using a Billy Graham, probably the most famous evangelist in the past few centuries, if Billy Graham had never shared the gospel once the exact same number of people would be in heaven as was what he was saying. And I was like, hmm, I get that, that's true according to Calvinism, that also doesn't make any sense from what the Bible talks about the urgency of evangelism. So many commands, but making disciples, proclaiming the gospel to the whole world, all of those things. And how God wouldn't be instructing us to do those things if they were pointless. If the exact same thing is going to happen whether we did them or not, similar to to prayer, some people get these about prayer. That why even bother praying if God's in control and already knows what's gonna happen? Well, because God commanded us to and he wouldn't have commanded us to if it was pointless. So the accusation against Calvinist is typically there's no motivation to evangelize and there are truly some Calvinists who don't, but that's not been my experience at all with the vast majority of Calvinists I've met. I've met many who fully embrace all five points to Calvinism and yet are extremely bold in sharing the faith and trying.

Jeff Laird

Things possibly can go in that direction. You're right, but it's not. It's not something that every five point Calvinist is going to necessarily get to.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, totally. So if you go into Calvinism so much that you're all just totally focused on the sovereignty of God, yeah, I could see how that could lead you to question why bother sharing the Gospel with this person if he or she is elect, he or she will believe, if he or she is not

elected, they won't. Again, the Bible tells us share the gospel, make disciples proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Always be ready to give an answer. All those things which tell us we are to be actively sharing our faith. So yes, God is sovereign in salvation, but humanity is also responsible. This takes us back to you don't have to understand perfectly how it works in order to follow God's command. So yes, there are some Calvinists who don't share the gospel, who don't really believe it's important, but the vast majority of even full Calvinists are very active in sharing their faith in proclaiming the gospel. Why? Because Christ commanded us to do so, and it's part of following him and proclaiming the gospel and trusting that God will bring about the results that he desires in the hearts of the people whom we're sharing the gospel with.

Jeff Laird

My thought on that is that I think that Hyper Calvinism is what we refer to that as where people say there's no point in evangelism. I don't think that that's a fair interpretation of certainly what not the vast majority of identified Calvinists believe. I don't think it's a fair representation of what Calvin himself would have undertaken. Because it's just not. That doesn't make any sense. On the flip side, I do think that there is an inversion of that that is sort of a sticky wicket for Calvinism, and that's the other side of evangelism. If everything in five point Calvinism is true as commonly and traditionally understood, it is possible for me if I'm a non believer, and you're evangelizing to me and for whatever reason, part of your evangelism is to explain those points, I'm sort of logically in a good spot to look at you and say then I'm just gonna walk away because what you're telling me is that I can't do anything to make myself want God. I'm only going to want God if God makes me want God. And nothing I say, do, or think is going to change that. So why should I worry about it right now? Thank you for your time. Some people, I'm sure, will dispute that and disagree with it. And I'm not saying that that's a reason that Calvinists cannot or should not evangelize. But it is one of those things that sort of creeps in there that we have to just be aware of in the way that we handle what are probably supposed to be in house debates behind the curtain kind of discussion?

Kevin Stone

We have two very profound theological truths. One is the sovereignty of God and the other is the free will of man. This gift of God to us as creations in his image, where we have the ability to choose and to make moral decisions. And so how those two things work together is kind of what Calvinism is trying to explain, and it's also what Arminianism is trying to explain. And I think what what we have to come to grips with is that there is a there is a wholly tension in scripture between the two. It's meant to be this way. There is no contradiction. There is no contradiction between God's sovereignty and mankind's responsibility. But in trying to avoid the contract, a seeming contradiction, we have these two camps that have been set up so full Calvinism, full Arminianism. I think both of them are trying to explain something that doesn't really need to be explained, just accepted by faith. And and and to accept this holy tension, this divine tension that we have in Scripture.

Kevvin Stone

In First Corinthians chapter 4 in the the Paul versus Apollos debate, as the Corinthians were kind of dividing into factions. I am with Apollos. I am with Paul. And Paul says no, no, no, that's not the way the body of Christ is supposed to be working. But he, Paul says this to them that he wants them to learn from us the meaning of the saying do not go beyond what is written. Then he goes on to say. Then you won't get puffed up. You won't get proud about about what you know and all that. To be a follower of one of us is is not what it's all about. Be a follower of Christ. And so in order to maintain proper humility, Paul says it is, it is best to not go beyond what is written. If we could apply that to this whole debate of Calvinism and Arminianism, we're dealing with some of the mysteries of God. And we need to be careful not to go beyond what is actually written in scripture. Bringing in logical constructs and and saying well, this makes sense to me if I if we can make it all work this way. We just have to be careful. I think we need to just take the the cautious route and say you know, it's scripture is not real clear on some of the

details here and that's OK. I'm going to, I'm going to look to Christ and let him be the author and finisher of my faith.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent point, Kevin, and I'd love the do not go beyond what is written, not just in this issue but in so many other issues where it can be fascinating. It can be fun to debate. And in our desire to try to figure it out, to try to be able to explain it fully, we end up inserting our own logic and making up theology all the way to it's possible this could be actually the right explanation, but once we go beyond what is written, it no longer has the inerrancy of God's word, the inspiration of scripture by the Holy Spirit behind it. So that's when it gets dangerous. So thank you for pointing us a good reminder. And Jeff, let me ask you this next question, but you are the most philosophically bent of the three of us. What is?

Jeff Laird

Bent is a way I've been described, but yeah. Go ahead.

Shea Houdmann

What? What is fatalism and how does it relate to Calvinism?

Jeff Laird

Fatalism is the idea that everything that's going to happen is just going to happen and nothing you do makes a difference. Which is sort of a cynical way of talking about God's sovereignty. Cynical being different than skeptical. A skeptic is somebody who's not sure and wants more evidence. A cynic is somebody who's just already made-up their mind, and that's the end of it. So these cynical view that God is sovereign is to say, He's already decided he already knows, and that means that nothing I say or do makes any difference whatsoever, so I'm not even gonna bother to try to to think about it or consider it. Or I'm just gonna do whatever I want to do. Or I'm, I'm gonna spend my whole life in terror because I'm not sure if what I'm experiencing is just my feeble human mind confusing me. That's fatalism.

Jeff Laird

And it's not just a theological thing. There are people who are fatalists in, in other senses, too. I don't think that that's a good explanation for exactly how Calvinism goes at it. There is sometimes an issue with Calvinism that the emphasis on God's sovereignty sometimes can become, it could become so unbalanced that we forget that, like Kevin said, there are more things said in Scripture than just God's sovereignty. Those other things don't contradict God's sovereignty, but God does say things like choose, and you know you refuse to come to me, and you need to hear. And you need to respond. Somewhere in there is that tension in between them. And if you focus too much on God's sovereignty, then you do start to run into questions where you you get questions about sort of a fatalistic attitude. Which is to say, well, if if God is so sovereign then, if anything, anything is about human decision, then what does that mean about things like sin? How does that mean that God is not responsible for sin if literally everything is entirely a subject to God's sovereignty and he is the one who decides, how is he not responsible for sin?

Jeff Laird

Yes, I know keyboard warriors thank you, that there are explanations that Calvinists have for that. And probably the most concerning of those is the jump to mystery. I we've used that term and I think it's fair in a lot of cases, but there are times where we will jump to saying, well, it's a mystery. Which sometimes just means it's a contradiction that I can't explain, but I'm just going to go with it. There's a difference between something that's beyond our understanding and something that just doesn't make sense. So fatalism brings up those ideas. I don't think that even 5 point Calvinism fairly understood implies fatalism. Implies that I I don't nothing matters. That's where Hyper Calvinism comes in is what difference does it make? But it is something that one has to be careful of. Like we say about going beyond what is written. If we start to emphasize something in a human framework beyond what Scripture actually says, then we wind up getting into exactly those kinds of problems.

Shea Houdmann

So if I were to pinpoint, maybe the and Jeff, you've already hinted at this, but it's it is a major issue for, for Calvinism in the sense it it makes God the author of evil. Even on the episode most recently published one of the comments on YouTube was, I reject Calvinism because it makes God the author of evil. And well, depending on what you mean by the author of evil, there's some Calvinist that say yes God does ordain evil to happen. Because he has ordained everything that's ever happened in the history of the universe. And there's others who would use the term more like no God allows evil to occur according to his plan. But there are scriptures that clearly that God does not commit evil. God does not tempt anyone to evil. God does not force anyone to evil. Those sorts of things. So this is a difficult balance. But related to the sovereignty aspect, if you go too far into it, focus on it alone, you start really thinking well did like did God create evil? Which is again a whole nother episode. But those some who reject Calvinism do so because of this issue, because in their mind, if God is absolutely sovereign in everything, then that means God actually actively brought evil into existence and ordains evil acts to occur, which I don't know how you come to that view without believing that God actually is evil.

Jeff Laird

I have a little nugget to sort of put in with that. I think that one of the things that's helpful is to remind people who do have a strong view of God's sovereignty, that God's sovereignty if it means anything, it also has to include the ability to not exert his power when he so chooses. If I have a little glass cup on my desk and there's an ant in it, I am perfectly capable of crushing the ant. There's nothing it can do to get out. There's nothing it can do to resist me. I can just reach in there with my thumb and squish it. But that fact does not therefore compel me to squish the ant. Nobody's gonna argue that I couldn't do it if I wanted to, but I actually have power, which means I don't have to. So sometimes sovereignty gets used in a sense where we say as soon as we assume that God is not actively making a choice in something that we're somehow violating his sovereignty, we're not. And that's a concern that both profess Calvinists and non

Calvinists can get into. But I think that's one of the reasons I don't think that Calvinism really implies fatalism is because if God is truly sovereign, then that means he can choose when to intervene, when not to intervene, when to allow, which is a great word, and when not to. So I think it's sort of a helpful way to get people past that is just to remember if God is really sovereign, that doesn't mean he has to do everything he can do.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, sovereignty does not mean, yes, God has the power to do anything that is in accordance with his will with these attributes. That doesn't does not mean that everything that happens is something he actively did. Kevin, let me ask you this next question. Is it really something that you said earlier and it's something that I saw a question about in the other day. And someone actually responding to our podcast on Calvinism. The question was I just, I believe, like a Calvinist but I preached like Armenian.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, that's kind of what I do, I suppose. I I've kind of phrased it this this way, though sometimes when I'm when I'm explaining things to people, I'm I'm gonna say I'm gonna present I'm gonna present the gospel to you as if it were all up to you. You need to believe. You need to repent. You need to turn to Christ in faith. But I'm going to pray like it's all up to God. And it is God who changes the heart and all the rest. So. So I, you know, both are true. You know, I'm going to, I'm going to present the gospel. And I'm going to, I'm going to ask for a response. And then I'm going to leave the results up to God. And sometimes even I've kind of even put it this way, that your responsibility, or I'll just make it personal. My responsibility is to believe. God's responsibility is to save and to preserve and so I'm going to take care of what I'm supposed to take care of, which is believing. And then I'm gonna let God handle the rest. And I know that probably drives both sides crazy when I say things like that. But that's kind of how I look at it sometimes.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, Jeff, thank you for joining me through this entire series. Just because we've already gotten some questions about it, yes, our series on Calvinism concludes with this, but we're actually going to do probably two more episodes that are closely related. We're going to do an episode on what is Arminianism, because while with each of the five points we kind of discussed briefly the Armenian alternative to Calvinism. But it Arminianism is it warrants us to explain it as a system just as we did Calvinism. We're not going to do all five points again, we've covered a lot of these issues before. But we'll do episode on Arminianism. And then I think we'll do one more on some of the other alternatives to Calvinism and Arminianism besides just describing yourself, I'm, I'm a two and a third point Calvinist. There are other ways to look at this. So, such as Jeff, would you like to introduce the term?

Jeff Laird

Just to make people angry, sheer molinism the one that really gets everybody going. But you're right, there are alternatives. It's good if we talk about some of those other ideas. The MOLINISM in particular is one of the bigger ones, but there are others.

Shea Houdmann

Yes. So yeah, so well the Calvinism series is over we're gonna continue, at least for another couple episodes on this theme of helping to understand the views that are out there. And again our heart in this is to focus on what does God's word teach even on these really difficult issues that really difficult for us to put into a nice little box like we'd like to. But focus on what does Scripture teach? How does that impact what I believe and how I live out my life? So hope you detected that heart through these episodes. That's truly our goal on this. So again, Kevin, Jeff, thanks for joining me today. This has been the Got Questions podcast on what are the implications both positive and negative of Calvinism? Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.

