

**AN OPEN LETTER
TO A FRIEND
EXPLAINING
WHY I AM A CALVINIST**

Dear Friend:

You are aware, and perhaps even puzzled (and annoyed), that I speak about "Calvinism," "Reformed Theology," and the "Doctrines of Grace." However, you may not fully understand what I mean by these terms, and what lays beneath my different perspective. Please allow me to tell you why I think, speak, and believe the way I do.

I grant you that the terms I have mentioned are given to gross misunderstanding. "Calvinism" in modern thought does not even remotely resemble what the term has meant historically. "Calvinism" as a world-view and theological perspective predates Calvin, and yet we use his name to identify this perspective because he so beautifully and eloquently expressed it in his writings. Calvin himself was a wonderful Christian man, he was not the sinister dictator of Geneva who scared people with the doctrine of predestination. One merely needs to actually read his commentaries or Institutes to see the depth of his devotion and love to Christ. As one has said, Calvin's Christian character is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate. But I use the term "Calvinism," not because of the man, but because of the system of thought he so well represented, and therefore, I do not hesitate to call myself a "Calvinist."

I also speak of "Reformed Theology." This too might be prone to misunderstanding. In fact, the spectrum of misunderstandings that might be associated with this term is so varied that I cannot even begin to identify all of them. Some may think of reformed school, others a rigid strictness, still others liberal forms of

Christianity. But what I simply mean by "Reformed Theology" is that theology which was rediscovered by the reformers. I am speaking of the theology of Luther, Calvin, and those who followed in their tradition. This theology can very simply be defined as a God-centered theology. And so I say gladly that I am "Reformed" in my theology.

And why do I talk about the "Doctrines of Grace"? I suppose, from my perspective, this term sums up rather accurately what I believe, but this too is open to distortion. Grace certainly does not mean the same thing to everybody. Without question, the Roman Catholic teaching on grace is far from the Biblical view, but even within the sphere of evangelicalism there are those who think they exalt grace but actually debase it. They supposedly glory in "free grace" but twist both words to mean nothing more than infinite tolerance on God's part. They proclaim a grace which demands nothing, and changes nobody, it is a grace that is subject to man's will and may lie dormant and fruitless. This distortion of grace is not what I mean by the "Doctrines of Grace." When I speak of the Doctrines of Grace, I am speaking of the sovereign and free act of God in showing Divine favor to ill-deserving sinners, this kind of grace transforms lives and is called by Paul "the reign of grace" (Rom. 5:21).

So much for terms, by the time I finish there will be no doubt as to what I mean by these terms.

First, I want to say that theological debate for the purpose

of academic entertainment has nothing to do with my firm position. Although I greatly enjoy theological discussion, my tenacious grip on the Doctrines of Grace extends far beyond any of that. I implore you not to think that I am a Calvinist merely because I like the verbal fencing. Furthermore, I would like to dispose of any notion that these things are merely academic for me, and that my Reformed position is simply the product of an overly nit-picking, analytical mind. These perceptions, although widely held and even justifiable in some cases, are false where I am concerned. Please listen carefully as I tell you why I am so consumed with these magnificent Biblical truths.

I am a Calvinist, Reformed in my Theology, holding dearly to the Doctrines of Grace, because my mind is consumed with a zeal for God's glory, thoroughly convinced of His absolute sovereignty, and painfully aware of my total and pervasive depravity. My soul is thrilled when I consider the words of Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." How I rejoice when I read God's promise, "But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21). His glory is the preeminent theme of the Bible, His glory is the goal of all things (Rom. 11:36), His glory should be the passion of our lives, the impetus for evangelism (Psa. 86:9), and the motivation for all that we do (1 Cor. 11:31). Calvinism is the only theological perspective that properly acknowledges and boasts in the glory of God, and fully recognizes it as the Summum Bonum of all things. "For from Him and through

Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen"
(Rom. 11:36).

Reformed theology is also the only theology which correctly understands and describes God's unrivaled, absolute sovereignty. I know that great lip service is paid to the sovereignty of God, but when push comes to shove, for many, God is simply a responder to man's actions, not the initiator. Many may claim to believe in God's sovereign control over nature, some even dare to say they believe in His sovereign providence, but how few believe that God is enthroned over our very salvation! God is sovereign, yes! And He also actively exerts that sovereignty over all things. He is actively in control and rivaled by none in creation, providence, and salvation. How wonderful to rest in the fact that "Our God is in the heavens and He does whatever He pleases" (Psa. 115:3). What a comfort to realize that "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (Psa. 103:19). Consider Job's testimony, "I know Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). The testimony continues throughout the entire Word, and it is conclusive and clear, "Yahweh reigns! Let the earth rejoice" (Psa. 97:1).

Not only does Calvinism acknowledge God for Who He is and what He does, but it also correctly reveals what man is. The Bible is not ambiguous about the human condition, and Reformed theology has merely expressed what the Bible so clearly sets forth, and that is that man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), that he

"cannot understand the things of God" (1 Cor. 2:14), that his mind and heart are fully corrupt and hostile to God (Rom. 8:7; Jer. 17:9). To theologize about such issues is one thing, but it runs much deeper than that. For I am convinced that I once was a rebellious, ruined, wretched, sinner, who loved his sin and had an idol for a god. I know what the Bible says about the human condition, and I know that it fully corroborates with what I know to be true about myself. You see, we are not merely sick with sin in need of some gospel medicine, we are dead in sin and in need of a gospel resurrection.

My friend, I love the Doctrines the Grace! I love them because when I was dead in sin, God, in free and sovereign grace, opened my blind eyes, gave me life, faith and repentance. And so in light of my own helplessness I sing with joy:

O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness like a fetter Bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander- Lord I feel it- Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart- O take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts
above.

Certainly you can see my theology is deeply personal, and I do not merely believe the Doctrines of Grace, I love them. They point to God, they magnify His grace, they exalt the person and work of our Blessed Savior, they humble man and put him in his proper place before a Holy God. Reformed theology is above all, God-centered. It joyfully affirms His absolute, unrivaled sovereignty over creation, providence, and salvation. It also realistically deals with you and me as fallen sinners in need of a sovereign Redeemer. It is true to the testimony of the Prophets and Apostles.

I know that some may argue that I am simply representing one theological camp, that there are other equally valid options. Let me say as kindly as possible, I do not see Arminian theology as merely a different theological option, just another camp, another school of thought. Arminian theology is the theology of the carnal mind, which is thoroughly man-centered. Arminian theology diminishes grace, denies God's sovereignty, denigrates the work of the Savior and the Spirit, and places the will of the creature over and above the will of the Creator. I cannot see this as merely another school of thought, but rather as an enemy to the true, Biblical gospel.

In my gospel (it is mine because I have wonderfully been the object of its power and have been made a messenger of it), which was Spurgeon's gospel, Edward's gospel, Whitefield's gospel, Owen's gospel, Calvin's and Luther's gospel, Augustine's gospel, the Apostles' gospel, and yes, Christ's gospel, God gets all the glory and honor. He shares His glory with nobody (Isa. 48:11). And even though man is unable and unwilling to come, many still speak of free-will, as if man chips in his contribution. My friend, if man is pervasively depraved, then so is his will! His will is in bondage to his own lusts and appetites, and the only freedom he knows is the freedom to sin freely. And so we say, God in His grace decided to choose some from this depraved lot of humanity. He gets the glory! The question is not, "Why did He only choose some?" The real question is, "Why did He choose any?!" Those whom He choose, He predestined them to adoption and conformity to the

image of His Son (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8:29-30). In His proper time, He sent His Son to secure the redemption of His elect, not merely to make that redemption possible (Heb. 9:12). On Calvary, redemption became reality, not potentiality. In time, those for whom He died, He effectually called (Rom. 8:30), regenerated (Eph. 2:5), and granted faith and repentance (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 11:18). Those elect, who in time, repent and believe, are destined for Heaven, and their destiny is secure (Jn. 10:27-29; 1 Pet. 1:5). They are preserved and they do persevere unto the end because God finishes what He begins (Phil. 1:6). God does indeed get all the glory!

In Heaven, when all has been said and done, God will say, "It is finished, all that I have decreed has come to pass, not one jot or tittle of My plan was frustrated, by devils or humans. All of My elect, whom I have loved before the foundations of the world, are here. Not one has perished! I, and I alone, God in perfect Trinity, have accomplished all of My good pleasure." And I rejoice in that! I rejoice that He will receive all the praise and glory. The elect of God will eternally magnify His grace through eternal salvation, the impenitent and unbelieving will eternally magnify His justice and holy wrath through everlasting damnation. Both will bring Him the glory due His name (Rom. 9:22-23). This is the teaching of Scripture, this is the gospel of God's grace.

Believe me, a world-view and theological perspective such as this radically changes the way one worships and lives his life before a majestic, glorious God. The Bible makes it clear, one

cannot approach God in worship with levity and casualness. Worship suddenly becomes by necessity reverential and sober. A joyful reverence, yes! A joyful sobriety, yes! But never the cavalier, nonchalant approach that is so prevalent in our churches today! Furthermore, the Bible is equally clear that the grace of God changes lives! The Reformed understanding of sanctification is Biblically balanced, and joyfully acknowledges if there is life there will be a pulse, where grace is found there will also be found changed lives. A fruitless, growth-less, workless Christian? It is a contradiction in terms, and the Bible knows no such creature, and Calvinism makes no room for such lies. Most certainly, this world-view and theological perspective impact the way we live and worship.

My friend, this is why I am a Calvinist. These are the very reasons I am Reformed. Here is why I adore the Doctrines of grace. I believe that by His grace he has opened my eyes to these truths (Matt. 10:25-27; 16:17). I believe that these truths alone flow from a Biblical view of an absolutely sovereign God. I believe that these truths alone glorify our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, and elevate Him to His proper place. And it is these truths which God has used throughout the history of His church to bring revival and awakening. May it please Him to do so in our generation.

Please do not despise these truths. I know they are very different from what you have heard and been taught, but please, do not harshly reject what you do not understand. I ask you to

realize that I believe the way I believe because I love God and His glory, and am all too aware of my own corruptions. In your quest for truth, ask the Spirit to enlighten your eyes to the Word of God, and I believe that you too will see a sovereign, gracious God who saves sinners.

SOLI DEO GLORIA