

Introduction

Calvinism, the understanding of Scripture that stresses God's sovereignty over all things, including an individual's salvation, is not as popular as it once was in decades past.¹ However, more recently there has been something of a resurgence, especially among younger people.² Nevertheless, even when the term is not used, often the concepts associated with Calvinism (known also as "the doctrines of grace") continue to play a significant role in the life of both individual believers and in the church. This is especially so amongst churches that trace a Reformed heritage, though by no means limited to such traditions.

My own spiritual pilgrimage began in a context where a weak but clearly present form of Calvinism existed. However, as I progressed in my understanding of the faith and in my own reading of the Bible, I gradually became increasingly aware of a certain discomfort between the Calvinism I heard preached and taught and my own understanding of Scripture. Was it really the case that God unilaterally decided who would be saved and who would not? Was God's grace really not resistible and, if so, how did my sinning fit in? Was it true that human nature was so depraved that a person was totally incapable of even responding to the gospel invitation apart from God's effectually causing him to respond? Was faith really a gift of God; if so then who was to be blamed when individuals refused to believe? And so on. These were the sorts of questions I struggled to come to terms with.³

It would be many years before I could precisely identify and articulate the source of my discomfort, but even at an early stage of my Christian life I realized that what I heard being taught and believed by godly Christians did not seem to correlate with my own reading of the Bible (especially the New Testament). The result was confusion. How could these preachers, teachers, authors, and friends possibly be mistaken? Even the possibility seemed

inconceivable to me. Weren't they merely expressing what Calvin, Luther, and the other great Reformers of the Protestant Reformation had taught?

The focus of my confusion lay in the doctrine of salvation, formally known as soteriology. However, since this doctrine is intimately connected with other doctrines—in this case the doctrines of Humanity, Grace, God, Christ, the Spirit, and Providence, to name a few—it was not easy to understand the issues and how they related to one another and so bring the needed clarity. Eventually, however, after much reading and after eight years of theological education, clarity did come, confusion was greatly reduced and a peace concerning the truth about the meaning of salvation enjoyed.

This present study arises from the conviction that many sincere Christians are today as confused about this doctrine as I was. This confusion is held by both lay persons and by pastors.⁴ My goal is to help us all see more clearly and more accurately what the Bible really teaches about this important doctrine. My hope is that uncertainty and confusion will be replaced by understanding, clarity, and a confidence in working out our salvation borne of insights that faithfully reflect God's word.

A word about terminology; I use the term Calvinism somewhat reluctantly and only because it concisely encapsulates the distinct set of beliefs associated with the name of the great sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin. There really is no other term or phrase that can accurately and succinctly take its place. Furthermore, this is the term traditionally and historically used in this sort of context.⁵ My reluctance stems from the perception that the term may be used here pejoratively. That is most certainly not my purpose. My purpose has to do only with descriptive efficiency. For the same reason, I have chosen to designate all soteriological views that contrast significantly with Calvinism by the term non-Calvinist.⁶

My approach follows from the desire to bring clarity to the doctrine of salvation in order to remove confusion caused by those who espouse a view that is, I believe, fundamentally flawed. Consequently, I will use the Calvinist's view of salvation as a foil with which I can interact with the doctrine. This indirect approach will serve on the one hand to show where

and why Calvinism fails and, on the other hand, to provide a more biblically faithful and coherent understanding of the doctrine, though the emphasis will necessarily fall upon the former given the focus of this study as stated in the title of the work.

There are several reasons for Calvinism's popularity and appeal both in the past and also today. First, Calvinism is a well-defined and internally consistent doctrinal system. All the elements that make up a Calvinistic soteriology "hang together" very tightly with no internal contradictions.⁷ As we shall see, part of the reason for such internal coherence is the prominent role the Calvinistic understanding of predestination holds within the system. Of course, internal consistency need not necessarily mean the doctrine is true. Consistency is a necessary but not sufficient criterion of veracity. Nevertheless, the coherence of Calvinistic soteriology has a certain appeal that serves to reinforce the belief that the Calvinistic perspective must be true.

Another reason that helps explain Calvinism's appeal is its concern to uphold the glory of God. This is apparent in John Calvin's own writings and in the writings of many Calvinists to this day.⁸ It is probably true to say that concern for God's honor and glory is a high motivation for the embracing of the Calvinist's "doctrines of grace." (Of course, this may also explain why some Calvinists not only hold fast to their Calvinist convictions, but also why they sometimes appear rather dogmatic in their defense of Calvinism).

Yet a third reason why Calvinism is so popular is due to the comfort to be had in believing that God fully "controls" the situation when one learns, for example, that one has cancer.⁹ It is also comforting to believe that one's salvation can never be "lost" and that one's ultimate destiny is infallibly certain from the moment one believes the gospel. The comfort a Calvinistic view of God's sovereignty provides is clearly seen in Robert Peterson's book on election and free will. Under the heading "The Insecurity of Contemporary Life" Peterson appeals to a Calvinistic understanding of election (God chooses who will be saved) as functioning "to comfort the

people of God and assure them that underneath all their meager efforts to live for him are God's everlasting arms to hold, protect, and caress them."¹⁰

Another reason for the appeal of Calvinism is the central role its most prominent theologian, John Calvin, played in the history of the Protestant church. The Reformation is rightly viewed by the evangelical Christian as the key event in church history that liberated the people of God from the ecclesiastical bondage and corruption of the Roman church in the sixteenth century and toward a Scripture-focused faith. Not surprisingly therefore Calvin and the doctrines of salvation associated with his name should come to be viewed as authentic (and orthodox) Christian belief. The fact that Calvin was the first theologian to systematically and comprehensively expound the Bible no doubt reinforces the close connection between the Reformation, Bible centered theology, and the distinctive doctrine of salvation taught by Calvin.¹¹ In short, part of Calvinism's appeal is tied to a great event in church history (the Reformation), and a great leader of that Reformation (John Calvin).¹²

A final reason that may explain Calvinism's current popularity concerns the perception that it provides a strong, robust, and substantial theology—in contrast to what is considered by many to be shallow, emotionally oriented church preaching and life. There is no doubt that many of the church's intellectual heavyweights, both in the past as well as the present, have espoused Calvinism. Most books on theology and related disciplines (apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and so on) have been written by Calvinists. The rise of "seeker sensitive" churches and the ubiquitous contemporary Christian worship music, often with shallow and highly repetitive lyrics, can lead to a longing for a church life with more substantial theological content. In short, Calvinism is a reaction to much that is perceived to be superficial in the church today.

Let me say a word about the approach taken in this study. Each chapter will begin with some introductory remarks intended to orient the reader with respect to the topic to be discussed. This will be followed by a clear presentation of the Calvinist's position consisting of quotes from Calvinist

writers. I want to present the Calvinist position as fairly as possible and avoid any kind of misrepresentation. I will then identify a few of the most commonly cited biblical texts used by Calvinists to support their viewpoint. These texts will be carefully evaluated and analyzed to see whether the Calvinist interpretation is in fact the correct one. Biblical texts supporting a non-Calvinist understanding of the doctrine will also be given. Following the biblical examination, I will provide a theological critique of the doctrine under consideration. This is accomplished by a series of theological issues related to the doctrine at hand. For example, under the study of election I raise and discuss eight theological issues, and under the irresistibility of grace I raise and discuss eleven theological issues.

The study is structured around the so-called five points of Calvinism summarized by the acronym TULIP: *Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints.*¹³

In the first chapter I seek to provide a historical perspective. It will be seen that the issues raised in the present study are not new. In fact, the debate between a Calvinist and non-Calvinist soteriology go back at least to Augustine's dispute with Pelagius in the fifth century AD.¹⁴ This chapter will also serve to show that godly Christians on both sides have existed down the centuries right up to the present time. It also reminds us of the need to exercise humility and love whenever we find ourselves in debate with Christians with whom we disagree doctrinally. Unfortunately, the lack of such Christian virtues has sometimes marred the debates over this doctrine in the past.¹⁵

In the second chapter we examine the Calvinistic perspective on the human condition, i.e., the nature of human nature. We will see that Calvinism takes a very dim view of human nature subsequent to the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. Human nature is held to be totally depraved, which is understood to include a total inability to even respond to the gospel call to be saved. In this chapter both the doctrine of original sin as well as the doctrine of total depravity will be critiqued.

The third chapter examines the difficult doctrine of election. Here, it will be seen that Calvinism is quite insistent that God chooses who will be saved—and therefore also, either directly or indirectly, those who will *not* be saved. Here is where the concept of an eternal, all determining divine decree comes to the fore. In addition to examining the key biblical scriptures used to justify the Calvinist position, theological considerations around the ideas of election and predestination are discussed.

Chapter 4 considers the scope of Christ's atoning sacrifice and some implications of the Calvinist's view that the benefits of Christ's death (salvation) was intended only for the elect. Variations on this theme (four-point Calvinism, Amyraldism) are examined for their validity. Since Scripture closely ties the atonement to the love of God, then an atonement limited by God necessarily carries implications for the scope of God's love. The implication of a limited atonement for the task of evangelism is also examined.

In chapter 5 we will examine the Calvinist belief that God's grace, insofar as the application of salvation is concerned, is irresistible. Those whom God chooses to save cannot resist God's grace that inevitably leads to that person coming to salvation. Here, the concept of grace is discussed as well as the different ways God's grace finds expression in Scripture. Of crucial importance in this chapter is the reality and role of free will insofar as a person's response to the gospel call is concerned. Other crucial issues concern faith as a God-given gift and what that entails, as well as the idea that regeneration (new-birth) must precede faith.

Finally, in chapter 6, the view that those whom God calls to be saved will infallibly continue in the faith until the end—the perseverance of the saints—will be carefully assessed. Does the Bible support the notion that a believer may never “lose” his or her salvation? Crucial related issues will also be examined, including assurance of salvation, and the possibility and reality of apostasy. Finally, some pastoral implications of the doctrine will be discussed.

In the concluding chapter, several important problems associated both with Calvinism's methodology and content are identified and discussed.

As we examine these five aspects of salvation, we will inevitably be discussing other closely related doctrines. Examples would include the nature of faith, the nature of divine sovereignty, the basis for assurance, the relation between redemption accomplished (at the cross) and redemption applied (to the individual Christian). Several hermeneutical issues will also be noted as they often play a key role in interpreting any particular passage or text.¹⁶

Throughout this study it will be apparent that the concept of the decree of God is crucial to a Calvinistic soteriology. A divine decree refers to God's unilateral, unconditional decision or action. For example, God decreed to make a world. Having made a world, he decreed that its human inhabitants who willfully violated the Creator's moral precepts would suffer punishment. So, in principle, there is nothing problematic with the idea of divine decree. But I shall argue that, within consistent Calvinism, the decrees of God are comprehensive, fine grained, particular—ultimately responsible for everything that occurs within the created order. This includes an individual's salvation. It is this notion of decree that is shown to be very problematic for a doctrine of salvation that seeks to be biblically faithful.

¹. Calvinism usually refers to the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) within the Reformed tradition; accordingly, Reformed theology is broader than Calvinism and includes other distinct doctrines such as ecclesiology, bibliology, and eschatology.

². They are sometimes known as "The Young, Restless, and Reformed" after Collin Hansen's book by the same title.

³. I suspect my own story has been replicated many times over. A well-known one concerns the theologian Clark Pinnock, who recounts his story in *The Grace of God*, 15–30. Another is Austin Fischer, in his book *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed*, as is the New Testament scholar Scot McKnight, who offers the preface to Fischer's book.

⁴. The confusion may be seen, for example, by preachers who make both a Calvinist and a non-Calvinist point concerning salvation in the same sermon! It is inconsistent, for example, to insist that a born-again believer simply cannot choose to forfeit his or her salvation (a Calvinistic belief) and at the same time stress that an unbeliever's experience of salvation depends entirely on the choice he or

she makes in response to the gospel. The confusion is also evident when some Christians jokingly use the term “Calminian” to summarize their beliefs in this area.

5. There are in fact a variety of “Calvinisms.” Felipe Diez, for example, lists no less than eight distinct versions of Calvinism in his blog post. More commonly, reference may be made to hyper-Calvinism, Orthodox Calvinism, or High Calvinism. The differences lie in some aspect of Calvinism’s soteriology—for example, some Moderate Calvinists may hold to a universal atonement (so-called four-point Calvinists), whereas other Calvinists would limit the atonement to only those God has chosen to save (so-called five-point Calvinists). In this study, most of the time I shall be referring to the form of Calvinism that is most internally consistent to the entire system. Consistent Calvinism is sometimes labeled “hyper-Calvinism” by other Calvinists.

6. As just noted, while there are varieties of Calvinism, on the whole and generally speaking Calvinism is more tightly defined than non-Calvinistic views of salvation; the elements of Calvinistic soteriology cohere well. If one had to describe non-Calvinists by a single term that term would be Arminian, after the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), who disputed several of the tenets of Calvinism in his day. Like Calvinism, there is no single non-Calvinist view, but rather a variety of perspectives each differing in one respect or another from the other. Examples would be Classical Arminianism, Wesleyan Arminianism, or Traditional/Provisionalist non-Calvinism.

7. At least, from a Calvinist’s perspective. However, as we shall see there are indeed “tensions” within Calvinism that are often resolved by appeal to “mystery.”

8. An example from Calvin is his conviction that some people (the non-elect) are established in their depravity “that [God’s] name may be glorified in their destruction.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.14.

9. Within a Calvinistic system God retains full control only by ultimately causing the event in question—such is God’s sovereignty. Few Calvinists, however, will directly acknowledge God’s causing their cancer, preferring to use the softer term “control.”

10. Peterson, *Election and Free Will*, 10.

11. Not that Calvin was the first to stress divine predestination and sovereignty in salvation—this was also stressed by Augustine in the fifth century. My point, however, is that Calvin’s name has been strongly associated with this view of salvation, an association reinforced by the formative period in church history in which he lived.

12. Calvin’s teachings in this area also received legitimacy because of the great dependence Calvin (and Luther before him) had on Augustine’s teachings. Arguably, Augustine (354–430) is the most influential Christian theologian in church history.

13. These five aspects of Calvinistic soteriology were first explicitly stated at the Synod of Dort in 1619.

14. Of course, it is anachronistic to speak of a “Calvinist” soteriology before the time of John Calvin (1509–1564), but the concepts and issues involved predate Calvin. However, as indicated earlier, I am using the term “Calvinism” as a descriptor of a set of consistent beliefs having to do with the doctrine of salvation and which, in this sense, transcends any particular historical period.

15. In my experience I have found that it is often Calvinists who lead exemplary godly lives and who are the most enthusiastic students of God’s word. Rarely, however, a Calvinist may misspeak, as in this example from the well-known and highly respected theologian J. I. Packer: “The difference between them [Reformed and Arminian theology] is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves, the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself. . . . One

makes salvation dependent on the work of God, the other on a work of man.” Packer, “Introductory Essay,” 4. Of course, no responsible Christian of any stripe views his salvation as self-salvation or a work of man!

16. Biblical hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a distinct field within Christian studies.

A Brief History of the Doctrine of Salvation

The history outlined below focuses on those aspects of salvation denoted by TULIP. There are other aspects of salvation that will not be included such as justification, sanctification, and adoption into the family of God. While undoubtedly Christians differ on their understanding of these aspects of salvation also, the differences are not pivotal in the same way as TULIP.

The Early Church¹

The early church fathers tended to stress the role of human free will in decision-making in general, and in responding to the gospel call specifically. This emphasis was, at least in part, due to the prevailing philosophies and worldviews of the day that emphasized fatalism and absolute, impersonal determinism.² “For Origen, as for all the early fathers, freedom was vital as the antithesis of fate or necessity.”³

Of course, the early church’s theologians recognized the references to predestination in the Christian Scriptures, especially in Paul’s writings, and understood predestination to salvation to be based on God’s foreknowledge of how people would respond to the gospel call; those who responded favorably (by exercising faith and repenting of their sins) were predestined to salvation. Justin Martyr (d. AD 163) for example, held that “the people foreknown to believe in [Christ] were foreknown to pursue diligently the fear of the Lord.”⁴ However predestination was understood, there was the general conviction that it would not entail the overruling of human choice in the matter of salvation.

At this early stage of doctrinal development, the view that subsequently came to be known as synergism—the idea that God and man cooperate in

the appropriation of God's gift of salvation—was naturally dominant. Clement of Alexandria (150–215) is a good example:

And as the physician ministers health to those who co-operate with him in order to health, so also God ministers eternal salvation to those who co-operate for the attainment of knowledge and good conduct; and since what the commandments command are in our own power, along with the performance of them, the promise is accomplished.⁵

This state of affairs was radically changed around 410 when Pelagius, a British monk and Christian moralist who was distressed by the lax moral conditions prevailing at Rome in his day, took offense at a prayer of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in which the latter stated: "Give what thou commandest and command what thou wilt."⁶ He believed Augustine's prayer would lead to a resignation to sin. If God's grace was such that only God could give what God commanded then this raised the question as to the role of man's responsibility for his behavior in moral affairs. For Pelagius moral responsibility implied moral ability. If Augustine was right, what room was there for human choices and moral responsibility?

Pelagius opposed the sentiment that a given moral responsibility is "too hard and difficult. We cannot do it. We are only human and hindered by the weakness of the flesh."⁷ Such an outlook, argued Pelagius, implied God was unaware of the weaknesses of men in giving commands that men could not consistently fulfill. Also, God was not so unjust as to condemn a man for what he could not help.

With respect to the question of human freedom, Pelagius argued that three elements exist: (1) the possibility to make moral decisions (*posse* in Latin), (2) the will to make moral decisions (*velle*), and (3) the capacity to effect or realize the moral decision (*esse*).⁸ The first (the possibility) may be ascribed to God and associated with man's creation by God, the other two elements (will and capacity) he attributed to the human agent. Consequently,

man's praise lies in his willing and doing a good work; or rather this praise belongs both to man and to God who has granted the possibility of willing and working, and who by the help of his grace, ever assists this very possibility. That a man has this possibility of willing and effecting is due to God alone.²

In addition to ascribing to man significant capacity to do the moral good, Pelagius also denied the view concerning the origin of man's sinfulness, namely original sin.¹⁰ "Everything good and everything evil in respect of which we are either worthy of praise or of blame, is done by us, *not born with us*."¹¹

Finally, for our purposes here, Pelagius and his disciple Coelestius also taught the following: (1) that a person can be without sin if he chooses, and (2) that unbaptized infants have eternal life.¹² (3) God's grace is manifested (a) in providing a revelation of his will in the Bible and in (b) forgiving those who repent of their sin. (4) Predestination to salvation was based upon God's foreknowledge (prescience) of those who would respond favorably to God's grace of forgiveness and thereby be saved.

Through his writings and his interactions with Augustine, Pelagius raised key issues concerning the doctrine of salvation that reverberated down the centuries to this day. The origin and extent of sin, the origin of the soul, the relationship between grace and human moral freedom, the extent of a person's ability to do moral good, the nature of grace itself, the basis and nature of God's predestination, and ultimately the nature of divine sovereignty. Most fundamentally, is salvation monergistic (all of God in every respect) or synergistic (aspects uniquely of God and also aspects that require man's cooperation)?

Augustine strongly opposed Pelagius. Though, in his disputes with the Manichaean sect, Augustine had stressed the role of free will in being the source of evil, later in his disputes with Pelagius Augustine agreed the will was free—but only to do evil, to sin. The will was in fact in bondage to sin. Furthermore, it was in this state from birth.

While a few of the early church fathers had hinted at a connection between Adam and subsequent humanity's sin, it was Augustine who almost single-handedly synthesized and developed this notion which he called "original sin."¹³ Augustine's strongly negative view of man's ability to not sin was strongly influenced by his conversion experience. In his book *The Confessions* Augustine describes his depravity and struggle with sexual sins. This experience convinced him that human nature is so depraved that an unregenerate person is "not able not to sin."¹⁴ Furthermore, Augustine found justification for this understanding of sin in his view of original sin in Rom 5:12–21, where Paul connects Adam's disobedience with sin, death, and condemnation. The prevailing common practice of baptizing infants was appealed to as further evidence of the devastating effects of the fall on subsequent humanity.¹⁵

Through his emphasis on the corporate solidarity between Adam and the rest of humanity, the tragic situation of original sin into which all people are born, the liability to condemnation for all unbaptized persons because of the guilt of Adam that they bear, and the inheritance of a corrupt nature that spells the inevitability of actual sins whenever unbelievers will to act, Augustine both defeated Pelagius and left a legacy of a robust theology of sin.¹⁶

Unlike Pelagius, who ascribed the universal sinfulness of humanity subsequent to Adam as being due to living in a fallen world and in following the example of Adam, Augustine attributed universal sinfulness to original sin.

Before leaving Augustine, it is necessary to briefly summarize other key aspects of his soteriology. Given the inherently sinful state in which every person enters the world, Augustine's teachings inevitably raised the question concerning how any person could be saved. Since total depravity entailed a total inability to do any morally or spiritually good including, of course, a turning to God in response to the call to repent and believe the gospel then

salvation would depend exclusively on the grace of God. For Pelagius grace was conceived objectively in terms of God's undeserved actions for our good—such as revealing himself to mankind, sending his Son, providing a universal call to salvation. For Augustine, however, grace was understood as some kind of internal, subjective force that acted directly upon the will and was infused into the person.¹⁷ This understanding of grace was necessitated by his view of original sin as entailing total depravity, which in turn entailed a total inability to do any good, especially the good of responding in repentance and faith to the gospel call. If anyone was to be saved it would be because God would choose to act supernaturally to provide grace that would free the person's will from its bondage to sin and enable the desired response of repentance and faith. "Unless this damage [to our moral nature due to sin] were overcome by the assistance of grace, no one would turn to holiness; nor would anyone enjoy the peace of righteousness unless the flaw were mended by the operation of grace."¹⁸

Furthermore, Augustine insisted that this grace is irresistible. If God chooses to apply grace then its actions upon the will cannot be thwarted or resisted. "Grace moves the will, but only through a 'soft-violence' that acts in such a way that the will agrees with it."¹⁹

Intrinsic to the strong monergism developed by Augustine are the issues of election, predestination, and perseverance.²⁰ The logic is clear; since no one is capable of responding to the gospel due to sin (both original and personal), then if anyone is to be saved such salvation must require and be due to the initiative of God. God chooses who will be saved unconditionally.²¹ Since it is obvious that not everyone is saved, then God's election of individuals is selective. The basis of the choice made by God is a mystery. God is not subject to the charge of injustice because he is under no obligation to save anyone from the consequences of their sin (divine wrath and judgment)—they are merely getting what they deserve. Since God's choosing is accomplished "before the foundation of the world" then we may rightly term this sovereign electing act of God as predestination. God predestines those who will be saved. "The elect are pulled out of this 'mass of

condemnation' which is humanity through a sovereign act of God, who has predestined them for salvation."²² Finally, since God has determined a fixed number of the elect then their salvation is assured, and that requires that they persevere to the end of their lives. God grants a persevering grace that guarantees the elect continue in their faith.

Unsurprisingly, given the emphasis until Augustine by the church fathers upon the reality of human freedom as opposed to the deterministic tendencies of the gnostics and prevailing religious cults as noted earlier, and the relatively novel teaching concerning the irresistibility of grace and Augustine's strong predestinarian thrust, his views were not left unchallenged. As Henry Chadwick remarks: "Augustine's propositions provoked a quick reaction in several quarters."²³ Julian (380–455), bishop of Eclanum, in Italy, insisted Augustine was wrong to view sex negatively (as concupiscence)²⁴ and a contributing factor in the transmission of original sin.²⁵ As Chadwick comments, "Julian thought . . . Augustine had brought his Manachean ways of thinking into the church, was defaming the good handiwork of the Creator under the influence of a hagridden attitude to sex resulting from the adolescent follies described in the Confessions, and was denying St. Paul's clear teaching that God wills all men to be saved."²⁶

John Cassian (360–435), a theologian in one of the monasteries in southern Gaul (France), was likewise distressed to hear of Augustine's strong predestinarian views, coupled with a grace that was irresistible. He was convinced these emphases in Augustine represented "a most disturbing innovation, quite out of line with 'orthodoxy' . . . that body of belief which is held undeviatingly by the universal church."²⁷ Wand concurs: Cassian "felt considerable difficulty in accepting Augustine's teaching, and . . . denied that divine grace was irresistible. He asserted that man's will always remains free."²⁸ Cassian's soteriology accepted Augustine's stress on the need for divine grace to assist the will; however, he also agreed with Pelagius that the nature of human freedom was such that the will could choose to either do good or evil, and not as Augustine asserted, that the will could only choose

to do evil. This mediating view came to be known as semi-Pelagianism (though it could just as easily have been called semi-Augustinianism).

Despite these voices of dissent, Augustine's views generally prevailed in the church of his day. In AD 416 two African synods condemned the Pelagians. In AD 418 Emperor Honorius ordered Pelagius to be exiled. However, that same year a council met at Carthage in north Africa to condemn Pelagius's teachings in favor of Augustine's views of sin and salvation. Again, a few years later, despite the fact that nineteen bishops refused to sign the document of condemnation, Pelagius's views were formally anathematized by the Council of Ephesus in AD 431.²⁹

Debate in the church continued beyond AD 432, however. Due to the influence of Cassian and others who took a softer, semi-Pelagian, line, the Synod of Arles condemned certain aspects of Augustine's theology in AD 473. The offending aspects included Augustine's denial of the need for the human will to cooperate with God's grace (synergism), and the destruction of free will.³⁰ The latter was viewed as weakened or warped, but not eliminated.³¹

Finally, in AD 529 another ecumenical council at Orange opposed the tendency toward semi-Pelagianism evident at Arles. This council was more Augustinian in flavor,³² insisting that even beginning moves toward God followed from God's grace that enlightened the mind and enabled belief. Grace was prior to faith. (This kind of grace was later to be called prevenient grace.) However, the council also strongly condemned any notion of double predestination—the idea that God not only predetermines those whom he would save, but also predetermines those who would be lost.³³

The Medieval Church³⁴

The influence of Augustine's soteriology on subsequent church history cannot be exaggerated. Erickson sums up Augustine's impact on subsequent centuries thus: "In the fifth century Augustine developed a synthesis of Platonic philosophy and theology (*The City of God*) which in many ways

dominated theology for more than eight hundred years.”³⁵ Gonzales also notes the tremendous influence Augustine has had on the history of Christian theology: Augustine’s “theology was to such an extent responsive to the needs of human existence as well as to the requirements of the human mind that for centuries, and even to this day, Augustine has been, after Paul, the most influential thinker in the history of Christian thought.”³⁶ Noting the influence of Augustine’s conversion experience on the subsequent history of the doctrine of salvation Gonzales likewise notes that “the overwhelming and dynamic experience set forth in the *Confessions* is being transformed into an entire system of grace—a process that was perhaps inevitable, but nonetheless unfortunate.”³⁷

As far as the doctrine of salvation is concerned Augustine’s views were reinforced, consolidated, and solidified through the various councils noted above that were convened (often at Augustine’s insistence) in response to the Pelagian controversy.³⁸ The significance of all this is that if Augustine’s soteriology is mistaken and does not in fact accurately represent the biblical data then subsequent outworking of church history is likewise, at least to some extent, mistaken in its doctrine of salvation.

As was to be expected, though Augustine’s views did not become immediately universally accepted, his views ultimately prevailed during most of the medieval period.³⁹ Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1033–1109), understood sin in conformity with the notions of his day concerning the relationship between a lord and his serfs. To sin is to dishonor God and to fail to give God the honor due to him as protector and provider. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), a giant in medieval church history and a key theologian of Roman Catholic theology, viewed sin as a voluntary act by which people choose a perceived good in the created order rather than the ultimate good, God. For Aquinas then, sin is essentially idolatry. Neither God nor Satan can be held responsible for a person sinning. Aquinas distinguished between two types of sin. There is a form of sin in which a person deliberately chooses to turn his back on God as a willful and defiant act; such sins are termed “mortal” and deserve eternal punishment. Venial

sins, on the other hand, occur when a person sins but does so without hostility toward God or a desire to permanently turn away from God. This distinction between mortal and venial sins was to play a significant role in subsequent church practices.⁴⁰

Aquinas followed Augustine on the question of original sin. “Through origin from the first man, sin entered into the world. According to the Catholic faith, we are bound to hold that the first sin of the first man is transmitted to his descendants by way of origin.”⁴¹ In keeping with the traditional view of original sin from Augustine onward, Aquinas understood the sin of Adam to entail a loss of original righteousness, with an associated corruption of human nature. Consequently, men’s sins flow from a “disordered” nature stemming all the way back to Adam. Aquinas argued that the “disorder which is in people born of Adam is voluntary, not by their will but the will of their first parent. By the process of generation, Adam moves all who originate from him, even as the soul’s will moves all the members [of the body] to their actions.”⁴² In other words, just as a hand or foot does not move independently from the soul (the originating source), so a person’s sins today flow from the original originating source, a corrupt nature inherited from Adam.

The relationship between grace and the human will featured also in the medieval theology of conversion. Was the will completely in bondage to sin so that it played no constructive role in the reception of salvation as Augustine taught? Or was the human will free in some sense to choose to accept the gospel call to salvation? If it was free then to what extent, and in what way did it relate to God’s grace in the gospel?

On the topic of predestination, the Gottschalk debate “shows plainly that the issues raised in the Pelagian controversy had not been satisfactorily settled.”⁴³ Gottschalk (808–867), an astute student of Augustine, was a Saxon monk who soon after ordination preached in Italy. His very strong and uncompromising preaching of Augustinian monergism led to him being condemned in AD 848 and even eventually to his imprisonment in AD 849.

His message included the theses (1) that God foreordained both to the kingdom and also to death those whom he willed, (2) that there is absolute certainty of salvation and perdition, (3) that God does not will the salvation of all, (4) that Christ did die only for the elect, and (5) that fallen man has freedom only for evil.⁴⁴

The controversy created by Gottschalk's forthright preaching of Augustinianism was unfortunate and showed his detractors in a poor light, but also serves to show how aspects of Augustine's soteriology—unconditional election, double predestination, limited atonement, total depravity—were not universally accepted by the church. There were always those who felt Augustine went beyond the bounds of Scripture in these formulations.

Anselm sought to harmonize predestination and free will by positing that God ordains directly all good deeds (by his grace working in the elect) and he ordains evil deeds indirectly by permitting the evil to happen. Starting from the premise “that whatever God decrees to happen in the future shall necessarily happen,” it is “in the sense that it is by permitting the [evil deed] that God is said to be the cause of evils which he does not actually cause.”⁴⁵

Aquinas related predestination to providence. Essentially, he argued that since salvation was beyond a rational creature's natural capabilities its only source must be from God. Such supernatural directing (special providence) he called predestination. Conversely, the predestination of the reprobate (the non-elect) occurs when God permits the punishment justly deserved. It is interesting that Aquinas uses the language of permission to soften the harshness of positive predestination of the non-elect to eternal punishment.

Baptism played a prominent role in medieval views about regeneration and conversion. Generally, newly converted adults were baptized and infants of Christian parents within the church were also baptized. In both cases regeneration—the new (spiritual) birth—was associated with the rite. Baptism of infants was needed to remove the effects of original sin.⁴⁶

Generally, Augustine's theology dominated the first centuries of Western theologians.⁴⁷ Augustine had made use of Neoplatonic thought in developing his theology and Neoplatonism was the dominant philosophy during most of the medieval period.⁴⁸ In the thirteenth century a more philosophical approach to theology took place under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy. The main impact of this new thought form was in the area of epistemology—how God could be known—rather than soteriology. The next major church period, the Reformation, however, saw a revival of the conflicts seen earlier between Augustine and Pelagius. It is to that tension we now turn.

The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation is formally dated to the time when the Augustinian monk and theologian Martin Luther (1483–1546) pinned his ninety-five theses listing complaints against the church of his day on the Wittenberg church door in Germany in 1517.⁴⁹ The primary issue for Luther was the sale of indulgences by the Roman church for the purpose of raising money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.⁵⁰ As the flames of the Reformation spread throughout Europe other issues quickly came to prominence. Chief among these was the view that a person was justified (declared not guilty by God) only on the basis of faith in God—justification and salvation was not in any way aided or supplemented with good works. The recovery of this important doctrine together with other biblical ideas such as the priesthood of all believers, the unique authority of the Bible, and salvation as a gift of grace alone became the hallmark of the Reformation and was accepted by all the Reformers.⁵¹

However, as a student of Augustine and holding to the prevailing Augustinian view of key aspects of salvation, Luther accepted the monergism of his day with respect to predestination, election, human depravity, and the perseverance of the saints in faith. Due to sin and the resulting total inability of man to do good, faith itself must be a gift from

God: “It is up to God alone to give faith contrary to nature, and ability to believe contrary to reason.”⁵² In fact, the will is in bondage to sin, we can only do evil. Luther likens the human will to a horse ridden either by Christ or the devil: “If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills. . . . If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.”⁵³ God elects unconditionally those whom he wills to be saved.⁵⁴ There is such a thing as a general, outward call to salvation and an inward call which effectually saves the elect. The general call cannot be responded to in faith because of sin.⁵⁵ The close connection between salvation and the (unconditional, secret) electing work of God naturally tends to raise questions of uncertainty regarding the reality of one’s own salvation. Luther countered this by encouraging believers to assurance of salvation by continuing to trust God’s word.⁵⁶ He taught that the elect would persevere in faith to the end.⁵⁷

The great Genevan Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564), like Luther, imbibed deeply of Augustinian soteriology.⁵⁸ Calvin, like Augustine, held to the doctrine of original sin. The original righteousness of Adam prior to the fall was replaced by “those dire pests, blindness, impotence, vanity, impurity, and unrighteousness [which] involved his [Adam’s] posterity also, and plunged them in the same wretchedness.”⁵⁹ This resulted in the propagation of a corrupted human nature in all of Adam’s posterity: “We are not corrupted by acquired wickedness, but by an innate corruption from the very womb.”⁶⁰ Consequently, “before we behold the light of the sun we are in God’s sight defiled and polluted.”⁶¹ The will is “enchained as the slave of sin, it cannot make a movement towards goodness, far less steadily pursue it.”⁶² The elect are those chosen by God unconditionally for salvation. In fact, the saved have been predestined for salvation and the reprobate have been destined for judgment:

As the Lord by the efficacy of his calling accomplishes towards his elect the salvation to which he had by his eternal counsel

destined them, so he has judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his counsel concerning them. . . . The Supreme Disposer then makes way for his own predestination, when depriving those whom he has reprobated of the communication of his light, he leaves them in blindness.⁶³

Thus, Calvin did not shy away from the notion of double predestination; both the saved and the lost were predestined for their respective ends. For Calvin, the predestination of the reprobate is for the glory of God: the reprobate “were raised up by the just but inscrutable judgment of God, to show forth his glory by their condemnation.” And all this is the outworking of an unchangeable and eternal decree of God: “[God’s] immutable decree had once for all doomed them to destruction.”⁶⁴ Since the sinner cannot believe, then faith itself must be a gift given by God.⁶⁵

Quite consistently, Calvin (citing Augustine) taught that God’s grace acted continuously to prevent the believer from failing to persevere in the faith: “To meet the infirmity of the human will, and prevent it from failing, how weak soever it might be, divine grace was made to act on it inseparably and uninterruptedly.”⁶⁶

While Luther’s view on the extent of the atonement was that the work of the cross was intended for the whole world, Calvin’s position has been debated among scholars. However, there can be no doubt that subsequent Calvinism held to a limited atonement—Christ’s death was only intended for the elect.⁶⁷

In the years following Calvin’s death in AD 1564, a certain hardening of Calvin’s teachings toward a rigorously consistent position developed. This came to be known as Protestant Scholasticism. A pioneer of this more rigorous approach to Augustinian soteriology was the contemporary of Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), who, under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy,

introduced into Reformed theology a methodological approach that would have profound influence on the later development of

that theology. Whereas Calvin started from the concrete revelation of God, and always retained an awesome sense of the mystery of God's will, later Reformed theology tended more and more to proceed from the divine decrees down to particulars in a deductive fashion.⁶⁸

As during the Pelagian controversy, and for similar reasons, not all agreed with the determinism associated with Calvinism.⁶⁹ A famous dispute arose between the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and the Reformed soteriology of his day. Arminius was a pastor of a church in Amsterdam until AD 1603 and then a professor of theology at Leiden until his death. Arminius was very much a thinker in the Reformed tradition in which he had been educated and moved.⁷⁰ His teacher at Geneva had at one time been Calvin's son-in-law Theodore Beza.

Arminius's distinct teaching relative to certain key aspects of Reformed soteriology began soon after he began his teaching position at the University of Leiden in Holland. The occasion that prompted dispute involved the teachings of his colleague at Leiden Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) concerning the doctrine of predestination, specifically the supralapsarianism taught by Gomarus. Supralapsarianism is the view that God decreed not only who would be saved (the elect), but that God also decreed the fall of Adam and Eve and the entrance of sin into the world.⁷¹ Arminius thought Gomarus's view of predestination too detached from a Christ-focused understanding and argued for a doctrine of predestination that was less rationalistic, more christocentric, and which served to edify God's people. But the distinctive aspect of Arminius's teaching on this subject was that predestination was not, as Gomarus and the other strict Calvinists taught, unconditional, simply following from God's decree to save some, but rather was conditional on the foreseen faith of those who would come to believe the gospel.

Gomarus and his followers sought to pressure Leiden University for the removal of all theologians that were of an Arminian persuasion. This in turn

prompted a reaction by forty-six pastors who signed a Remonstrance in AD 1610 upholding Arminius's views. It is easiest to summarize the Arminian perspective by examining the five points of the Remonstrance:

Article #1: Addresses the issue of predestination. It affirms God's predestination but makes it apply to "those who . . . shall believe on [God's] son Jesus . . . and shall persevere in this faith."⁷² God predestines those to salvation who believe the gospel.

Article #2: The atonement is not limited to the elect only, but rather the Savior "died for all men, and for every man . . . yet so that no one is partaker of this remission [of sins] except the believers."⁷³

Article #3: With Calvinism, Arminius agreed that human depravity is total in the sense that the human will is so corrupted that, unaided by grace, no one would be saved.

Article #4: God does provide a grace that is prevenient—it goes before and enables the person to believe the gospel. However, unlike Calvinism, this grace is resistible. (Though not stated in this Article #4, Arminianism understands prevenient grace to be universal.)

Article #5: This article addressed the issue of the perseverance of the saints—that those once truly saved cannot fall away from the faith. Unlike Arminius himself who felt that it was indeed possible for a Christian to fall away from the faith, the fifth article did not reach a conclusion on this point and asserted that it "must be the subject of more exact inquiry in the Holy Scriptures before we can teach it with full confidence of our minds."⁷⁴

Eventually, and after some political tussle involving the cities of Rotterdam, which was supportive of the Remonstrants, and Amsterdam, which opposed the Remonstrants,⁷⁵ and in response to the Remonstrance, a synod was called for at Dort in the Netherlands to consider the teaching of Arminianism generally and these articles specifically. It was from Dort that the acrostic TULIP emerged. The synod met from 1618 to 1619 and adopted

the classic Calvinist position on these contentious aspects of the doctrine of salvation. Predestination is not based on God's foreknowledge of those who would respond to the gospel but rather is based unconditionally on God's sovereign choice. This choice would be put into effect through a grace that was irresistible, and which would inevitably result in faith being granted the elect person. Whereas the Arminians viewed grace as a necessary prerequisite to overcome the effects of human depravity (prevenient grace) and thus make it possible for a believer to choose to respond to the gospel, the synod viewed grace to be irresistible in order to ensure the salvation of the elect. The synod rejected the possibility of a believer falling away and insisted that such a person would persevere to the end. By God's design the atonement would be limited only to the elect; the death of Christ was not intended for everyone.

The synod members required the Remonstrant ministers at that time to refrain from preaching and conducting other ministerial duties. They agreed to this demand when ministering in state churches, but insisted on the right to continue teaching Arminianism among those churches that met and held to the teachings of the Remonstrants.

Post-Reformational Developments

The broad contours of evangelical soteriology as outlined so far have remained surprisingly constant down the centuries following the Reformation. That is because evangelical Christianity traces its heritage back to the Reformation and with the key stands made back then: sola Scriptura (the Bible alone as a source of divine authority), sola gratia (grace alone as the basis for salvation, not meritorious works), sola fide (by faith alone, not faith plus works). These essentials have not changed for all expressions of evangelical faith. In addition, the key aspects of the doctrine of salvation argued over first by Augustine and the Pelagians, and then by Arminius and scholastic Calvinism have remained surprisingly persistent—right up to the present day. These include predestination, election, the resistibility of grace,

the extent of the atonement, and the perseverance of the saints. For this reason, I will only very briefly sketch the development of this doctrine in subsequent church history, slanting the focus toward the people and movements influenced by these aspects of salvation. We will see that, broadly speaking, the two positions, Calvinism and Arminianism, have largely crystallized into denominational movements holding to their respective theologies.

In England, the struggle over Christian expression in the land involved mainly the Protestant / Roman Catholic division, with the form of Protestantism being decidedly Calvinistic. In AD 1534 King Henry VIII proclaimed himself the head of the church in England (not the pope). This was done for personal and political reasons, not religious, and Henry himself remained somewhat sympathetic to Roman Catholicism. Subsequently civil war broke out in England as various monarchies tried to impose either their Catholicism or their (Calvinistic) Protestantism. It was from within this turbulent period of English church history that the Puritans were formed. These Christians were staunch Calvinists and were not happy with the compromise with Rome that the Church of England represented. They sought to “purify” the church. Most of the Puritans sought to work within the Anglican church to reform it. However, a small separatist movement was formed that chose to seek reform exclusively outside the established church. The Separatists, led by Robert Browne (1550–1633), were persecuted and many fled to Holland. Eventually, a small group of these Puritan Separatists (subsequently known as the Pilgrim Fathers) led by John Robinson (1576–1625) emigrated to the New World (America) crossing the Atlantic in the Mayflower in AD 1620. In this manner early American Christian expression was decidedly Calvinistic.

Beginning around the 1730s a revival, known as the First Great Awakening, occurred among the nominal Christians at that time. A key figure who played an instrumental role in the early stages of the revival was the Puritan pastor-theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who ministered at a Congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Edwards, in addition to furthering the revival through his preaching and writings, was a highly intellectual Calvinist and his impact on subsequent church history—especially in providing Calvinism with a strong philosophical and theological rationale—cannot be overestimated. Interestingly Edwards, like Augustine, had a dramatic conversion experience which he recounted in his work *Personal Narrative* (AD 1739). Sainsbury remarks concerning Edwards that he “had an experience which gave him a new awareness of God’s absolute sovereignty, and on his own dependence on God.”⁷⁶

In addition to a strong sense of God’s sovereignty Edwards also had a keen sense of human depravity and the bondage of the will. “Edwards produced his most important work at Stockbridge on the *Freedom of the Will* (AD 1754). In it he denies that man is free to choose. This viewpoint fitted with his Calvinistic doctrines of election, predestination and the fallenness of man in every respect.”⁷⁷

Another significant church figure associated with the First Awakening was the English Anglican priest and outstanding Calvinist outdoor evangelistic preacher George Whitfield (1714–1770). His outdoor preaching alienated him from the Church of England and later he became associated with a Calvinistic form of Methodism. In fact, he founded the English Calvinistic Methodist Connexion, later absorbed into Congregationalism. In addition to preaching in England, Scotland, and Wales, he also visited America (Georgia) on several occasions on evangelistic trips. “Whitfield centered his theology on the old English Puritan themes of original sin, justification by faith and regeneration.”⁷⁸

Contemporary with Whitfield and Edwards were the Wesley brothers, John (1703–1791) and Charles (1707–1788). Both were members of the Church of England and were heavily involved with the English Revival that occurred in the early 1740s. Charles Wesley is most famous for his many devotional hymns that he wrote—many of which endure to this day. John Wesley, however, had great organizational abilities and spearheaded what initially were called societies—groups of Christians touched by the revival

and who tended to meet in one another's homes for methodical study of the Bible. Later these societies evolved into the Methodist Church.

Unlike Edwards and Whitfield, however, John Wesley strongly opposed the doctrine of unconditional election. Instead, he made election conditional on faith in Christ. Similarly, the reprobate were such because of their refusal to trust Christ for salvation, not because of a supposed unconditional decree of God; "God proceeds according to the known rules of his justice and mercy, but never assigns his sovereignty as the cause why any man is punished with everlasting destruction."⁷⁹ Wesley agreed with Augustinians in the idea of original sin—thus all babies are born with a sinful devilish nature and subject to divine condemnation. On this basis Wesley justified infant baptism. The corrupted human nature that follows from Adam's sin (as well as the guilt of Adam), results inevitably in sinful human acts, and it is for these personal sins that one can be justly punished by God. So Wesley, along with the Calvinists, held to total depravity. To counter the total inability for any good that results from original sin, Wesley taught the idea of prevenient grace. This grace is provided to all men and removes the fatal disablement associated with original sin and thereby enabling the sinner to believe the gospel. Unlike the Calvinist's irresistible grace, prevenient grace can be resisted and so does not guarantee salvation—it merely removes any impediments to the sinner hearing and responding to the gospel call to be saved. Not surprisingly, Wesley denied the Calvinist view that it is impossible for one of the elect to fail to persevere to the end. Not only was it possible for a true believer to turn his back on God, but also to be reconciled if that person subsequently repents and exercises faith again.⁸⁰

In the first half of the nineteenth century another revival broke out in America. This time, the Second Great Awakening was more directed toward the saving of the unconverted (as opposed to the convicting of those professing Christian faith). A key figure during this period was the Arminian Congregationalist minister Charles G. Finney (1792–1875).

Finney is best known as an innovative revivalist, especially during the years 1825–1835 in the New York area.

Finney's anthropology was more Pelagian than typically Arminian. For example, Finney denied original sin, viewing it as unjust of God to hold subsequent humanity guilty for the sin of Adam. He also denied that human nature was fundamentally corrupted by the fall of Adam into sin. He viewed sin as only an external matter—a willful disobedience to God's moral law—not an inevitable consequence of an inherited corrupted human nature.

Moral depravity is not then to be accounted for by ascribing it to a nature or constitution sinful in itself. To talk of a sinful nature, or sinful constitution, in the sense of physical sinfulness, is to ascribe sinfulness to the Creator, who is the author of nature. It is to overlook the essential nature of sin, and to make sin a physical virus, instead of a voluntary and responsible choice.⁸¹

Finney, while denying that all people would be saved (universal election), denied the Calvinistic view of unconditional election. Rather election was conditioned upon foreseen faith: “The elect were chosen to salvation, upon condition that God foresaw that he could secure their repentance, faith, and final perseverance.”⁸²

While Augustinians⁸³ separated regeneration (the new birth) from conversion (turning to God), arguing that the latter was only possible due to the former because of total human depravity, Finney denied such a separation, viewing both as two sides of the same coin. “The fact that a new heart is the thing done, demonstrates the activity of the subject [God]; and the word regeneration . . . asserts the Divine agency. The same is true of conversion, or the turning of the sinner to God. God is said to turn him, and he is said to turn himself. God draws him, and he follows.”⁸⁴

Finney held to what is known as the governmental theory of the atonement. In this understanding of the significance of Christ's death there was not penal substitution, but rather “the atonement is a governmental

expedient to sustain law without the execution of its penalty on the sinner.”⁸⁵ The concern is with the preservation of public order—the sustenance of law. It was public, not retributive justice that mattered—it would not be just for God to punish an innocent person for the crimes of another. In this understanding of the atonement God’s intent in putting forth his Son was not limited to an elect few, but rather to all sinners; Finney held to a universal understanding of the extent of the atonement.

Not surprisingly Finney held to perseverance as conditional on faithful obedience to the end: “Perseverance in obedience to the end of life is also a condition of justification.”⁸⁶ Apostasy is a real possibility even for the true Christian: “It must be naturally possible for all moral agents to sin at any time. Saints on earth and in heaven can by natural possibility apostatize and fall, and be lost.”⁸⁷

While the doctrines of sin and salvation developed, especially following the Renaissance and the rise of liberal Protestantism, as far as evangelical theology is concerned the broad contours of the debate between Calvinism and non-Calvinists had been set by the end of the Second Great Awakening noted above. Subsequent American church history has been a history of denominations that are essentially Calvinistic in outlook and those that are more Arminian. Among the former denominations may be listed the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and varieties of Reformed churches (Dutch—including the Christian Reformed Church, German, Baptist, and Charismatic). Among the latter would be the United Methodist Church, Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church, Pentecostal churches, Holiness churches (Nazarene, Christian & Missionary Alliance, etc.), some Baptist churches (e.g., Free Will Baptist), Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, and the Salvation Army.

Having briefly sketched the historical background to the doctrine of salvation, with a focus on human depravity, election, the extent of the atonement, the role of grace in an individual’s salvation, and the nature of Christian perseverance in the faith, we are now positioned to critically

examine both biblically and theologically the Calvinist understanding of these aspects of salvation.

1. The early church period is roughly the time between the apostles and the death of Augustine of Hippo in AD 430.

2. Stoicism would be an example. Burke writes concerning this worldview: "Fate also plays a key role and underlies the belief in the cyclical character of the natural order, in which each cycle is identical to all the others." Burke, "Stoics," 1055.

3. Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, 46.

4. Cited by Allison, *Historical Theology*, 454.

5. Clement of Alexandria, *Writings of Clement*, 441.

6. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.29.298.

7. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 52.

8. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 52.

9. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 53.

10. Original sin is the doctrine that every person born subsequent to Adam and Eve is born with a sinful nature and with the associated (original) guilt before God due to Adam's sin. This doctrine relies heavily on Paul's teaching in Rom 5:12–21.

11. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 53, emphasis mine.

12. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 54.

13. See Toews, *Story of Original Sin*.

14. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 348. Ridderbos also notes that "in [Augustine's] own experience he had known the meaning of moral impotence. It seemed to him quite unreal to speak with the Pelagians of a free will and an uncorrupted nature." *Churches of Galatia*, 234. Similarly, Wand, *History of the Early Church*, 231, also notes the influence of Augustine's conversion experience upon his view of sin and grace: Augustine "relied upon his own experience of special grace, without which he was sure that he could never have recovered from his evil ways." Augustine is known for saying that before the fall Adam was able to not sin, Jesus Christ was not able to sin, fallen man is not able to not sin.

15. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 232: "The practice of infant baptism for the remission of sins presupposes that infants arrive polluted by sin; since they have committed no actual sin, remission must be for the guilt attaching to a fault in their nature. Therefore, if babies die unbaptized they are damned."

16. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 349.

17. "Augustine understood grace as a divine power or fluid that is infused into us. For him grace is no longer an attitude on God's part, but rather the manner in which God acts in us." Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:49.

18. Augustine, *Retractions*, 104.

19. Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:47.

20. Monergism is the belief that every aspect of salvation originates in, is accomplished and applied

by, God alone. That Augustine was a pioneer in this respect is seen in the Calvinist Loraine Boettner when he remarked concerning the early church before Augustine's day: "The earlier church fathers placed chief emphasis on good works such as faith, repentance, almsgiving, prayers, submission to baptism, etc., as the basis of salvation. They of course taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel. . . . They taught a kind of synergism in which there was a cooperation between grace and free will." Boettner, "Reformed Doctrine of Predestination," 364, 432. This coheres with our earlier observation that the early church fathers emphasized the reality of human free will in the role of salvation; Boettner, like all Calvinists, denied the will an ability to freely choose "to accept or reject" the gospel.

21. There is nothing outside of God that conditions whom God chooses to save. If there were any condition, such as repentance and faith originating as a human response, then God's choice would be conditioned on such faith and salvation would not be viewed as all of God.

22. Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:48.

23. Chadwick, *Early Church*, 232.

24. The inclination and tendency to long for fleshly, often proscribed, appetites.

25. "The sex instinct is only wrong when used in a way outside the limits laid down by God, and [Augustine] is quite wrong to confuse original sin with concupiscence." Chadwick, *Early Church*, 233.

26. Chadwick, *Early Church*, 233.

27. Chadwick, *Early Church*, 233.

28. Wand, *History of the Early Church*, 233.

29. Wand, *History of the Early Church*, 432.

30. Understood as a human capacity to choose either good or evil.

31. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 350.

32. Though Gonzales comments, "The synod itself, while condemning Pelagianism . . . did not adopt more than a diluted form of Augustinianism." Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:61.

33. "Both those who are saved and those who are lost are so predetermined." Geisler, "Augustine," 106. See also Allison, *Historical Theology*, 458: "On the doctrine of predestination it was reluctant to embrace Augustine's theology." Bromiley also notes Augustine's double predestination: "Augustine, in *The City of God* and the *Enchiridion*, teaches predestination to both salvation and perdition." *Historical Theology*, 167.

34. Approximately the time between Augustine's death in 430 and the beginning of the Reformation in 1517.

35. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 60.

36. Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 1:55.

37. Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:63. Gonzales is here remarking upon the conclusions of the Council of Orange in 529 on the brink of the medieval period. The reference to Augustine's view of grace on subsequent church history as "unfortunate" is all the more significant since Gonzales himself is quite sympathetic to Augustinian theology.

38. There was also, to some extent, a softening of rigid Augustinianism during the medieval period associated with leaders such as Pope Gregory the Great (590–604), Peter Abelard (1079–1142), and

John Duns Scotus (1266–1308)—all taking a more semi-Pelagian view of the effects of original sin; Adam’s sin weakened human nature but did not fatally corrupt it.

39. Those who opposed some parts of Augustinian soteriology became known as semi-Pelagians. Though, as Gonzales notes, “the so-called semi-Pelagians were in truth ‘semi-Augustinians’ who, while rejecting the doctrines of Pelagius and admiring and respecting Augustine, were not willing to follow the Bishop of Hippo to the last consequences of this theology.” Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:57.

40. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 352. I am indebted to Allison for much in this section on medieval soteriology.

41. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 351. Note the appeal to church tradition here, not to biblical exegesis or even appeal to a biblical passage.

42. Cited by Allison, *Historical Theology*, 352. The idea of a voluntary action on the part of a contemporary person that flows inevitably from the actions of a past event or person seems dubious to me.

43. Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, 169.

44. Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, 166. Bromiley inadvertently says, “Christ did not die only for the elect.” But in his later elaboration makes it clear that Gottschalk taught limited atonement in keeping with his teacher Augustine. I have omitted the word “not” for clarity. The second point means that the elect can never perish and that the reprobate can never be saved.

45. Anselm, *The Compatibility of God’s Foreknowledge, Predestination, and Grace with Human Freedom* 2.1, 2.2, cited by Allison, *Historical Theology*, 459.

46. Infant baptism preceded Augustine and was generally viewed as the initiation rite into the church. Augustine later appealed to the rite to justify his view of original sin—baptism washed away the guilt of Adam’s sin in the newborn.

47. The Eastern, Greek-speaking church was relatively uninfluenced by Augustine’s teachings in contrast to the Western, Latin-speaking church.

48. Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:244. The Greek philosopher Plato taught that Forms represent the ideal copies from which realities in the sense world are patterned.

49. There had been predecessors to Luther in the decades up to 1517. For example, the English scholastic philosopher John Wycliffe (1331–1384) anticipated the central role of the Bible in the Reformation by insisting that the Bible needed to be translated from the Latin to the vernacular so that all people could have access to the word of God.

50. An indulgence was a declaration by the church that a loved one’s soul would spend less time in purgatory or even be released altogether to heaven.

51. Luther made a big distinction between grace and law, and gospel and law. Not all followed him in such a radical disjunction.

52. Cited by Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 3:45.

53. Gordon Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 140.

54. There is nothing outside of God himself that conditions his choice of whom to save. This is in contrast to the idea of conditional election which holds that salvation is conditioned on faith and that

God elects those whom he foresees meets the condition, i.e., believes.

55. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 485.

56. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 550.

57. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 550.

58. Han notes that “Calvin frequently referred to and quoted Augustine in his writings. Augustine undoubtedly exerted an influence on Calvin’s views and arguments.” Han, “Investigation into Calvin’s Use of Augustine,” 1. According to Han, Calvin cites Augustine about 1214 times in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

59. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.5.

60. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.5.

61. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.5.

62. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5.

63. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.12.

64. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.14.

65. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.8.

66. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.13.

67. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 404.

68. Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 3:268.

69. I am using the term Calvinism here to refer primarily to the theology of Protestant Scholasticism. Determinism is the belief that God determines all events and outcomes.

70. “By sixteenth century standards, Arminius and the Remonstrants would have been seen as Calvinists by both Catholics and Lutherans.” Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 3:286. The Remonstrants were those who sided with Arminius.

71. This view is in contrast to an alternative Calvinist notion called infralapsarianism, which holds that God decreed who the elect would be but only did so after the fall.

72. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 268.

73. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 268.

74. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 269.

75. Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 3:283.

76. Sainsbury, “Jonathan Edwards,” 438.

77. Sainsbury, “Jonathan Edwards,” 438. Actually, Edwards didn’t deny man’s freedom outright, merely the freedom to choose either x or y (known as libertarian freedom). In fact, as we shall see later, Edwards developed another form of freedom that was compatible with Calvinism’s determinism.

78. Sainsbury, “Jonathan Edwards,” 441.

79. Wesley, *Predestination Calmly Considered*, 220.

80. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 558.

81. Finney, *Moral Depravity*, para. 8.4.

82. Finney, *Election*, 4.4.

83. That is, those who followed Augustine's soteriology, including Lutherans and Calvinists and all of Reformed persuasion.

84. Finney, *Election*, 4.4.

85. Finney, "Atonement," line 19.

86. Finney, *Justification*, 3.

87. Finney, *Systematic Theology*, 841.