

An Exposé on Reformed Theology (RT) and Calvinism (CV)

The Crumbling of the System

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The doctrine of Calvinism (CV) is a very logically arranged system of belief. Please understand - to say that it is logically arranged is NOT to say that it is true! Allow me to lay it out for you. Traditionally, the doctrine of CV has been labeled as TULIP. Man is, according to that system, **T**otally Depraved and has a sinful nature. Because of that condition, if a man will be saved, there must be a choosing that comes from the sovereignty of God. That is called **U**nconditional Election. If that doctrine is true, then it must also be true that there is a **L**imited atonement because, since the saved are sovereignly chosen by God, the atonement made was made only for the "elect." Next, since it is God alone who does the choosing of the individual, the grace that allows that to happen has to be **I**rresistible because God has predetermined the saved. Finally, since all of the above teachings are wholly dependent upon the sovereign selection of God, the salvation that results is guaranteed to never be lost. The logical conclusion necessarily leads to the doctrine of the **P**reservation of the saints.

Seeing that these doctrines are so intricately connected, if one is shown by Scripture to be false, then the whole system crumbles. One of the leading voices of CV was R.C. Sproul (deceased, 2017). In a YouTube video entitled, "*Total Depravity (Part 1)*" he said the following about **T**otal Depravity: "*And so the doctrine of total depravity describes and defines a particular view of original sin that has its roots in the teaching of St. Augustine. And, remember, that Augustine was the patron saint of the monastery where Martin Luther was reared in the faith and where he taught at Wittenberg. He was an Augustinian monk, and also Augustine was the most revered mentor of John Calvin, so that the thinking of Augustine had an enormous influence in the shaping of the doctrine of the Protestant Reformation.*"

This man, Augustine, lived from 354-430 AD. From whence did he get his "*particular view of original sin*" as Sproul referenced it? Augustine lived at least 300 years after Jesus brought His doctrine to the earth and then passed it on to the apostles by the Comforter (Jn. 14:26; Jn. 16:5-15). Did Jesus teach

that mankind was corrupted to the core - flesh and soul - by the sin of Adam? Did any of the apostles teach such a doctrine? In terms of what Jesus said, we have this: "*And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 18:2-4). Luke recorded, "*And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not:*

for of such is the kingdom of God" (Lk. 18:15-16). The errant doctrine that "*had its roots in the teaching of St. Augustine*" did not originate with Jesus!

What about the apostles' doctrine? In favor of the error of total depravity, many will use

Ephesians 2:3 as "evidence" that man is born in sin. The verse reads in part, "*...and were by nature the children of wrath...*" Notice, Paul did not say that men are "*by birth*" children of wrath. First, nothing is said in the text of bearing a corrupt nature because of Adam's sin. Second, as you read the entire context, the Ephesians had "*...walked...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind...*" He was describing their manner of life before they had been saved by God's grace. To say that they had walked in sin is not to say that they were born in sin, or with a sinful nature. How does one walk in sin? First John 3:4 informs us that sin is a "*transgression of the law.*" The violation one's conscience in disputable matters is called sin (Rom. 14:22-23). Failing to do what one ought is sin (Jam. 4:17). One who is newly born into this world is not capable of doing any of those things!

With a fair and honest examination of just a few simple passages, the evil doctrines of CV and RT crumble! The first petal in this ungodly flower withers away under the light of scrutiny. If the doctrine of total depravity is false (and it is), then the rest of the system falls with it. Man is made in the image of God. That has not changed. Man can choose to respond to God positively. That has not changed.

"The errant doctrine that 'had its roots in the teaching of St. Augustine' did not originate with Jesus."

The CV's and RT's are saturated in a man-made idea they call "sinful nature." It's the idea that Adam's one act of disobedience in the beginning (Gen. 3:6) to the revealed word of God resulted in the imputation of sin to the entire race. That through Adam, representative of the human race, all people lost their innocence and incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death. All are therefore inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. This depravity, they claim, is total - extending to the will as free moral agents, leaving all in bondage to sin, causing them to always choose darkness, and results in the inability to choose Christ. What does Scripture actually teach (1 The. 5:21)?

Let's look at a few key words. First, the word *sin*. This word is used about 446 times in the Bible. The first time it, is used by God in describing the behavior of Cain in murdering his brother, Abel (Gen. 4:7). God did **not** at that time, **or** any other time, explain that the reason for such sin was because of an inherited, depraved, sinful nature from Adam! Instead, God said to Cain that he was responsible for the choices he made and would suffer consequences for it. Interestingly, Cain did not blame his parents for a supposed "sinful nature!" The Greek verb for sin is *hamartano* and it means, "to miss the mark, to fail in one's purpose." All accountable people have missed the mark of God's standard - His word (Jn. 17:17; Rom. 3:23). Sin is disobedience to God. John wrote, "Everyone that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4 ASV). The KJV and NKJV uses the word *transgression*. To commit sin is to disobey the laws or commands of God. Sin is **never** described in Scripture as something someone inherits from Adam or one's ancestors (Eze. 18:20)! One transgresses God's law when he or she is drawn away by lust, enticed, and commits an act that is displeasing to God (Jam. 1:14-15). One sins against God because he or she makes a choice to please self; **not** because they are inclined to sin because of a "sinful nature" inherited from Adam. The first sin of Adam and Eve altered the human **condition** (physical death), but it did **not** alter human **nature**! The likelihood of a child growing into adulthood and making sinful choices is greatly increased with the influences of circumstances and associations; not a "sinful nature" inherited from Adam. Temptation reflects human free will, not a "sinful nature."

Another key word is *nature*. Paul used this word to describe a **sustained habit**. Note carefully how the Ephesians had once walked, lived, and fulfilled the desires of the flesh and mind (Eph. 2:3). As such they "were by nature children of wrath." Paul used three personal pronouns (you, we, our) to emphasize **personal responsibility**, not a sinful nature. As the prophet Ezekiel wrote, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (18:20). All

accountable people who are away from Christ have developed a sustained, habitual lifestyle of sin and are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). However, this is **not** because of Adam! It is because of individual choice and practice! Moses carefully noted that Adam became the father of a son after his image which argues **against** the false view that the image of God in man was lost as a result of the fall (Gen. 1:26; 5:3).

The most commonly misused verse to support the idea of "sinful nature" is Psalm 51:5. David, weary with his sin wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Did David write this verse to prove or affirm he was sinful as soon as he was conceived or born? Admittedly, he referred to iniquity connected to his birth. Plainly though, the main theme of this psalm is David's repentance for his own sins, especially the sins connected with his lust for Bathsheba. If the focus is on David's personal sins (v. 1-4), why did he refer to iniquity connected with his birth? David did this to express his awareness of the depth of sin in his heart and the seriousness of his own sin. He was humbling himself before God in **figurative language** in the same way Biblical writers sometimes referred to man as a worm (Ps. 22:6; Job 17:14; 25:6; Isa. 41:4). This is hyperbole - exaggeration for emphasis. The same mechanism was used in Psalm 58:3 "The wicked are estranged from the womb: They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." This does not affirm the idea of original sin or sinful nature since it is not applied to all human beings. It was an exaggeration intended to insult the wicked and emphasize the depth of their obstinance. The same is true of Psalm 51:5, which is meant to apply to the individual penitence of David, **not** an explanation of **why** David sinned. He was writing in **figurative language** (e.g., "against You, You only have I sinned," "hyssop," "whiter than snow," "bones you have broken") describing how he felt (sinful) and what he desired (forgiveness)!

Many passages are cited as "proof" that the Bible teaches all humanity has a "sinful nature" inherited from Adam. I challenge you to go to each of these passages and read them in their context to see if each Biblical writer was attributing the sin of the individuals mentioned to a "sinful nature" inherited from Adam **or** if he was describing the sinful behaviors of people who made a choice to sin against God! The careful Bible student will find **nowhere** in the Bible does a writer attribute the **reason** for a choice to sin to an inherited "sinful nature" from Adam. Rather, it is attributed to his or her desire to please self (Jam. 1:14). Since God is the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), the one who gives us our spirit (Ecc. 12:9), and He is sinlessly perfect - we **absolutely** do **not** have a "sinful nature" given by God **or** inherited from Adam!

False doctrines continue to permeate the religious world. The false ideology known as Reformed Theology (RT) is one among many. The false notions of RT are felt in merely all Protestant churches. But, what has become more unfortunate is that RT, with its variances, has been influencing the church that belongs to Christ. Of course, there are many particular teachings from God's Word that RT has distorted, but among these is the biblical concept of free will. Let's examine together the concept of free will by using the Scriptures in their proper context.

Simply stated, the biblical concept of free will is the ability to act at one's own discretion. Concisely, but accurately speaking, RT teaches that man's free will is bound. For example, RT teaches and believes that one is spiritually impotent and unable to do any redemptive good unless God, through the Holy Spirit, operates on his/her heart to bring about a new (regenerate) heart. Thus, RT teaches and believes that the process of "regeneration" (Titus 3:4-6) is the work of God ALONE. Dear readers, this distorted doctrine implies that man **must** wait on a miraculous intervention from God in order to be saved and then to live the Christian life. It also implies that man has zero ability to simply respond to the teachings of God of his own volition. Therefore, man DOES NOT have free will according to RT.

If God has equipped man with free will, then man has the ability to either accept or reject the salvation that God offers through His Son. The Scriptures emphatically teach that man has the freedom to make choices, thus he has free will. Man's ability to freely choose is vigorously illustrated by an example from the early stages of Israel's history. Joshua challenged God's people to make a personal choice regarding whom they would serve (Jos. 24:15). The people responded by making a choice. They chose Jehovah (Jos. 24:21-22), thus demonstrating their free will. Unfortunately, the Israelites eventually exerted their free will by abandoning Jehovah through "choosing new gods" (Jud. 5:8).

Let's be clear, all accountable human beings deserve eternal separation from the Almighty. However, God's grace has been extended to all of humanity. This grace is fully realized in Jesus the Christ (Jn. 1:16-17). So, here is the all-important question: Can man exert his God-given free will by choosing to leave the state of separation from God, which, of course, is the result of sin? In other words, can man choose to be saved? RT would advocate that man is incapable of choosing to be saved until God works a miracle on his/her heart. The problem with RT's position is that man has no way of knowing whether or not God has performed this so-called miracle on his/her heart which, according to RT, would enable man to choose right. As a matter of fact, RT will go so far as to say that if God miraculously intervenes to bring about a new heart, then man cannot resist it. RT is indeed twisted to the utmost with this line of reasoning. All we can know about God's will is what He has

revealed about it. God will not hold one accountable for violating a purpose which He has not revealed. Such would not be sin because sin is violation of Divine law, and law must be revealed (1 Cor. 2:10-14). RT presents Jehovah as some monster who presents Himself as a bigot by creating a new heart in some and refusing to do so in others. However, the Scriptures establish the truth that man does indeed have the ability to exert his/her free will by choosing to be saved. This is accomplished through man's wholehearted submission to the conditions laid out in the gospel. Consider some examples of man exerting his free will in responding to the will of God...

Matthew 11:28-30. Implied in Jesus' tender invitation extended to "all" is the fact that "all" had the **ability** to embrace His call. Thus, man had the **ability to choose** to be a disciple of Jesus or not. Jesus was not going to coerce anyone who did not freely choose for himself to come to Him. Notice the requirements that man must meet in order to embrace Jesus' invitation. He had to "come," "take His yoke" (accept His teachings and whatever obligations He would lay upon man), and "learn."

Matthew 23:37. Jesus expressed His deep desire for rebellious Jerusalem to be right with God. As indicated in the text, He would have gathered them **if they would have come**. But, they "were not willing" (NKJV). The word *willing* comes from a word that means "to determine." Thus, some of Israel **determined not** to embrace Jesus as the Messiah. Notice that Jesus refused to gather anyone who **chooses not** to be gathered. It all depends on the will of the individual.

John 7:17. One of the implications of Jesus' claim as stated in this verse is that one **must be willing** to do the Father's will. As a matter of fact, a willing and heartfelt obedience are both essential to a true knowledge of His doctrine. The honest heart, whose only desire is to do what is right in the eyes of God will have no difficulty in determining what is right. However, before a man can know the true doctrine of Christ, he must first exert his free will by determining to do what is right. What a powerful and impactful affirmation of the Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:17. Notice the strong appeal of the Spirit and bride to humanity to exert free will in order to take of "the water of life freely." The limitation put on this appeal is for those that "desire." John strongly emphasized man's free will in this passage. Augustine, John Calvin, and RT contend that humanity has become so enslaved by sin that we simply are unable to exert any real free will in exercising the faith that demonstrates itself in submission to Christ. Allegedly, man is hopeless unless God, through a supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit, enables him to act in submission to His will. The necessary conclusion is that if one never believes and obeys, it must be because he was not enabled. If this is the case, the responsibility of man's refusal to obey would not be his, but God's! How absurd! God has equipped man with the ability to choose.

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- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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