

CALVINISM AND PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

Studies in Calvinism

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The Calvinist and the Plymouth Brethren are diametrically opposed.

I am not making any claim that the Brethren are faultless but any unprejudiced Bible scholar in studying the doctrines of both groups will readily see that there is a mass of evidence that contradicts Calvinism. And it is not just Brethren who refute Calvinism.

Brethren are labelled Arminian by Calvinists but I suggest that Calvinists have distorted the teaching of Arminius. Jack Seaton says that Arminius taught universal atonement. Universal means 'of all and done by all' and atonement means the 'expiation of man's sins by Christ'. Therefore, universal atonement means that every man's sin is atoned for and, therefore, all men are saved.

That is not what Arminius or the Bible teaches. Seaton is either confused or is promulgating a false doctrine for some reason.

The definitions of Calvinism are both misleading and erroneous. In their acrostic the word TULIP is used to explain the five points of Calvinism.

The letter T stands for the total depravity of man. The Bible teaches that all men and women are sinners but the word depravity usually refers to extreme wickedness and irredeemable moral corruption. All are sinners, but not all are depraved. We all know sinners, as indeed we are, who are not murderers, thieves, adulterers and rapists.

Sin is any disobedience to God. For example, the denial of the Deity of Christ is sin.

The U in the acrostic stands for unconditional election which claims that God had elected, selected and chosen those whom He is going to save before the beginning of time without any conditions or man's agreement. We will deal with this in another essay, but this doctrine would make God cruel since He would be choosing who He would condemn to everlasting torment. The New Testament teaches that whosoever comes to Christ in repentance and faith shall be saved. If salvation was a foregone conclusion, since God had chosen who were to be saved before the foundation of the world, then the preaching of the Gospel might seem to be unnecessary.

The old hymn expresses it simply... Whosoever will, may come.

L stands for limited atonement. It means that the benefit of the atoning work of Christ is limited to the elect. The choice of words is unfortunate. The atonement is God's wonderful work of grace and should not be relegated to being limited. God is not limited. He can save to the uttermost all who come to Him. God is Omniscient and Omnipotent. There is no line that He cannot cross if He so wishes.

The fourth point is introduced by the letter I which stands for irresistible grace. Calvinists assert that if God reveals His grace to anyone that person cannot refuse or resist it, but will become one of the elect and be saved as this was ordained before the foundation of the world. In other words, that person cannot resist the grace of God. But many of us know that there are those who do. I did for many years, but no longer.

Finally, the letter P which stands for the perseverance of saints. Saints refer to the elect chosen before the foundation of the world. They can never be lost, can never become apostate and cannot turn their

backs on the Lord. But some do and we all probably know some. The children of Israel did many times and yet they were chosen by God. The Bible says so. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve elect and he was lost.

Hebrews 10.29 tells us of the severe punishment for those who tread underfoot the Son of God and regard His Blood as unholy and do despite to the Scripture of grace.

Dr Raymond Brown points out, “These apostates once acknowledged Christ’s Deity and trusted His work but no longer believe Him to be the Son of God and actually profane the precious Blood which He shed for them.”

The apostle Paul said of a one-time believer, “Demas hath forsaken me loving this present world...”

Some of us have baptised new converts at their request and on their public admission of their faith but, later, they turned away from the Lord and loved the allurements of the present world.

J N Darby writes, “If, after knowing the truth, they were to choose sin instead, there is no other sacrifice (for sin) “.

This troubles me. I baptised a young woman who was so keen on spiritual things but, after three years, she said the Christianity was too restrictive and ‘no fun’ and that she was young and wanted to enjoy herself.

Brethren do agree with Jacob Arminius but only because what he taught is the teaching of the New Testament but some early brethren accepted a few aspects of Calvinism.

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(This is one of several articles by Dr Wright on the subject of Calvinism)

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