

A Defense of Calvinism

By C. H. Spurgeon

excerpt on Calvinism and Arminianism

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer—I wish to be called nothing but a Christian; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it. But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views.

Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan; and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley.

The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God; he lived far above the ordinary level of common Christians, and was one "of whom the world was not worthy." I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of Heaven.¹

¹ Spurgeon was a 3-point Calvinist who believed that everyone has the capacity to come to Christ ("whosoever..."), and so his call was universal. Every Calvinist, even a 5-pointer, would agree that an external call is universally made. The issue is the internal call, which is our ability to hear and respond to the external call of the Gospel. The first of the five points of Calvinism is *Total Depravity*. It says that, apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit, no one is capable of hearing or responding to the call of the Gospel – and only the elect are enabled. Spurgeon seems to reject this point, which would make him semi-Pelagian (Pelagianism says that we are weakened by our sinful nature, not incapacitated). Christ said, "No one can come to me unless the Father ... draws him." (Jn. 6:44) These two views concerning our capacity, one saying anyone is capable, and Christ saying that some are not, are seemingly at odds. They can be reconciled if we say that only God can enable a sinner to come to Christ, but who God enables has not been pre-determined (therefore anyone can be part of the elect). However, the fourth of the five points of Calvinism is *Limited Atonement*. It says that Christ died only for the elect, who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). These two views concerning our election, one being pre-determined, and the other not, are also at odds. They can be reconciled if we say that God pre-selected those he knew would come to Christ, which is what we term "election by foreknowledge." These two methods of reconciliation are Arminian. And so it would seem that Spurgeon was Arminian – despite his profession of Calvinism. Nonetheless, he is absolutely correct when he says, "I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour." But that's because such persons are elect. Christian salvation is not the result of an intellectual exercise in which we come to the right conclusions about Jesus Christ and God's methodology. It is a sovereign act of grace bestowed on us by God, who has determined in his own will to save some, without regard to their merit, innate capacity, or dogma. – W.H. Gross