

Well, asking if Jesus taught Calvinism is a lot like asking whether George Washington had a PlayStation or a Nintendo. Technically, it's called an anachronism, which is a word that means something is out of its proper time sequence. "Ana," not "chronism"—time sequence. So, asking if Jesus was a Calvinist is kind of a backwards question because, obviously, Jesus came, what, 1,500 years before John Calvin ever taught. And yet, nevertheless, it seems to me to be a very important question because, essentially, in Reformed theology—or since the time of the Reformation—there have been a number of interpretations of a series of very important doctrines related to election, predestination, what grace is, and whether or not people can lose their salvation.

Broadly speaking, if we set aside Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, within the Protestant movement you have those who would describe themselves as Calvinistic, which leans more toward the sovereignty of God in salvation. You have those who describe themselves as Arminian, or even those who use the newer term "Provisionism." But nevertheless, it's an important question.

One of the things we want to ask ourselves is whether, in the 1500s during the Reformation, John Calvin invented these doctrines out of thin air. Did he misinterpret or reinterpret a strand of Christianity that had somehow become tangled through the years? Or was John Calvin's teaching a faithful representation of Bible-believing Christianity—biblical Christianity—and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ in particular? That's the question we want to ask today in this video. Anachronism aside, we're going to get down to brass tacks here and look at some of the teachings of Christ to try to determine whether or not we could classify those as Calvinistic.

Well, if you're new to this channel, what's up? I'm Matthew. I'm the pastor of Gospel Fellowship PCA. We are a Reformed, Bible-believing church just north of Pittsburgh. If you're looking for a Reformed church that teaches the Bible and loves Christ, come check us out: Gospel Fellowship PCA. I'm also an adjunct professor at RPTS—that's the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary right here in Pittsburgh. Love to have you come take some courses with us. If you're thinking about getting some higher education or going into ministry—especially if you're from a Reformed or Presbyterian perspective—RPTS is about the best you could possibly do.

Now, before we get into our topic, I do need to make one more clarification. My new book, *Bold as a Lion: Christian Courage in an Age of Cowards*, is coming out in just days—or perhaps hours—from now, depending on when you're watching this video. I'm going to put a link in the description. It's coming out as an e-book first, but then it's set to drop on Thanksgiving Day or Black Friday of 2025. Easy for me to say. So, whenever you watch this video, the book may already be out. Check the link in the description. All right—hopefully

it's going to be helpful on the themes of cowardice and courage, or bravery, which have always been considered Christian virtues.

All right, well, let's get into our main topic today: whether or not Jesus taught Calvinism. We've already described this as an anachronistic question because Calvin came way after Jesus. Here we also have to make another qualification: Calvinism as such is a much broader topic than what we would simply call the five doctrines of TULIP.

If you're familiar at all with Reformed theology and Reformed basics, you might think of Calvinism as being summarily defined by the five points of Calvinism. Of course, Calvin never said, "Hey, I've got five ideas for you." That never happened. In some ways, they were framed at the Synod of Dort. You can go watch some other videos for historical background on the Synod of Dort. But nevertheless, for the sake of convenience and ease in this video, we're going to consider Calvinism to be these five doctrines. (And again, I know there's a lot more to it. In fact, I have a whole video on Calvinism and Reformed theology, so check those out.)

- Total depravity is the idea that we're so sinful that we cannot save ourselves.
- Unconditional election is the idea that, before the foundation of the earth, God elected some to salvation (and others to reprobation), and that is unconditional—it is not based on whether or not He foreknows that you're going to choose Him.
- Limited atonement has to do with the death of Christ on the cross: who exactly did Christ die to save?
- Irresistible grace has to do with the Spirit's working in your life so as to convert the heart and save you from a state of depravity unto a state of salvation.
- Perseverance of the saints has to do with whether or not we can lose our salvation.

What we're going to do in this video is pretty simple: we're going to look through the teachings of Jesus, especially in the Gospels. Every single one of the texts we're going to look at today is what we might consider "red letter"—in other words, these are things that Jesus Himself said.

I believe that, easily and quite handily, we could defend Calvinism from texts like Ephesians 1, Romans 8, Romans 9, and so forth. But today, just for the sake of discussion—just for the sake of the question "Was Jesus a Calvinist?"—we're going to limit our conversation to the teachings of Christ Himself. I think that will make for an interesting topic as we work through this.

So let's get into total depravity. Did Jesus teach the concept of total depravity?

First, let's not botch the idea—let's let it play out fairly. Total depravity does not mean that you're as bad as you possibly could be—that every single one of us watching this video is the reincarnation of Adolf Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or whoever you think is the worst person ever. Total depravity doesn't mean you're as bad as you possibly could be. Obviously, you could go out and be worse today. You could become a supervillain in a Marvel comic right now if you wanted to. You could be worse.

But the question about total depravity has to do with whether or not we're sinful to the core—how about our affections? Our will? Our body? Our inclinations? Are those sinfully depraved?

Let's go through some of the teachings of Jesus and see whether or not He taught that.

The first one I want to look at is John 3. This is the important conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, where Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to the Lord Jesus and asks Him some questions. I take it that Nicodemus's intentions were pure—that he wanted to come to the Lord and learn what He taught. I don't think this was a trap. (There were times when the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus in His words purposefully, but for the sake of discussion, I think Nicodemus was being honest here.)

Nicodemus says in verse 4, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answers, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

I actually do think this defends the doctrine of total depravity. The reason is a couple of phrases Jesus uses in relation to human ability—or rather, human inability.

Notice in verse 3: Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So there's a delimitation on human ability: he can't see the kingdom, he can't come into it—he can't even see it—unless, first, one is born again. The qualification of being born again must necessarily precede one's seeing the kingdom of God. Otherwise, without that first condition being met, he cannot do the second.

Why is that? Because of sinful depravity. God does not receive unsaved, unsanctified sinners into His kingdom, into His glory, unless the person is first forgiven of their sins and justified by the blood of Christ.

Jesus says it again: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit—in other words, by conversion wrought by the Holy Spirit Himself—he cannot (key word) enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

I do think this defends total depravity because total depravity suggests that a person, on their own—by their own will or intentions—cannot enter the kingdom of God without the precondition of having been born again by the Spirit.

Here's another statement in John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Again we see this language of human inability: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

I remember R.C. Sproul teaching on this text and making a humorous little anecdote about the difference between "can" and "may." "May" has to do with permission; "can" has to do with ability. If a student asks, "Teacher, can I go to the bathroom?" the teacher might say, "Of course you can—and you may." Here Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

The reason a person cannot come is because of their sin, their depravity, their wickedness, and their unrighteousness. That's why you can't just waltz into the kingdom or into the Father's presence unless your sins are first forgiven.

Here's another text—John 6:63–65: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him.) He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

Again, same passage, same context—Jesus doubles down: unless the Father does the enabling work, he is unable—he cannot come to me.

If we ask, "Why can't I just come to you?" the answer is because of our depravity and sin. Unless the Spirit of God works conversion and change in our lives, we're unable to come into His kingdom, to believe, or to come into the Father's presence.

So, I would suggest yes—Jesus does teach the doctrine of total depravity.

(If you disagree with my assessment here, fight it out in the comments. If you're a Calvinist and you see an Arminian or Provisionist in the comments, hash it out with them. If you're an Arminian or Provisionist, let us Calvinists have it—tell us why we're wrong.)

Let's move on to the second one: unconditional election. Did Jesus teach the doctrine of predestination?

We know Paul did—he actually uses the term (Ephesians 1, Romans 8, Romans 9). It's easy to defend predestination from the Bible because the word and the concept are there. But our question today is more specific: did Jesus teach unconditional election?

Let's look at a couple of texts. First, Matthew 24 (the Olivet Discourse): "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

This is Jesus answering eschatological questions—questions about the end times. The Olivet Discourse is a very difficult passage; everybody agrees with that, whatever your eschatological view. But the one thing I want to point out is that Jesus speaks of the gathering of "his elect." Whose elect? The elect that belong to the Son of Man. He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather His elect.

This isn't just an accidental slip of the tongue. Jesus talks about the elect multiple times in this passage. If He speaks of the elect—the chosen ones—then there must be something like election. That's a pretty simple argument, but I think it holds.

Here's another passage: Matthew 25, the judgment of the sheep and the goats. He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

A couple of things: who's the King? It's Christ—the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. He says to the sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

One of the things we argue when we talk about predestination is that the elect are not those who elect God or choose God, but those whom God Himself chooses—through and for the glory of His Son, who is the King. And notice that this was done "from the foundation of the world"—very similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 1.

Next, John 13 (the night of Jesus's betrayal, the upper room discourse, where Jesus washes the disciples' feet): "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you—I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"

Jesus says, "I'm not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen." In Arminian and Provisionist categories, we usually think of the individual choosing or selecting God. But

that seems backwards from how Jesus describes it. Jesus describes it as His prerogative to choose His servants—even knowing the difference between those who are sincere and those who will betray Him (like Judas).

John 15: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..."

A text like this should probably end the argument between Calvinists and Arminians. Arminians (and I don't want to truncate or straw-man their arguments) basically say that God chooses us based on His foreknowledge of us choosing Him—the "prescient" view. But Jesus clearly says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you"—the positive and the negative.

Later in the same chapter: "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Jesus is the one who chooses us out of the world.

One more: John 17 (the high priestly prayer, hours before the cross): "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."

Jesus is going to save—to give eternal life—to all whom the Father has given Him.

So, I would argue that's unconditional election.

Now, let's move on to limited atonement. This is one we really have to explain because a lot of people get it wrong. Limited atonement doesn't mean Christ's grace or atonement is limited in power or lacking in any way. What we're talking about is the intentionality of whom Jesus came to save.

If He came to save absolutely every person who ever lived, then we could say He failed, because not everybody will be saved (we all agree there's a hell populated by the lost). But there's a more positive way: Jesus came to do the Father's will—to save the elect we just discussed.

Is that in the teachings of Jesus?

John 10: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Jesus distinguishes sheep from goats, saved from lost, elect from reprobate. He lays down His life for the sheep.

John 17 again (high priestly prayer): "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours."

Jesus atones for the limited subset the Father has given Him.

Mark 10: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

He says "for many"—not "for all"—because if it were for all, all would be saved.

Next: irresistible grace. Some think it means grace can never be resisted (but Scripture says people do resist grace). The point is that we resist until God, in His sovereign plan, overcomes our resistance and converts us—at which point we gladly submit. When God effectually calls, it cannot be ultimately resisted.

Luke 10: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Salvation is the Son choosing to reveal the Father—and when He does, it happens.

John 5: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will."

John 6: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

"All... will come"—certainty, not possibility.

Finally, perseverance of the saints.

John 6 again: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

John 10: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Doubly secure—impossible to lose salvation if truly saved.

Well, that's my case. There's a lot more text we could have covered. If I missed something—from either side—correct me in the comments. Hash it out down there.

But at the end of the day, here's my conclusion: It is anachronistic to say that Jesus taught Calvinism—Calvin came 1,500 years after Christ. It's a little backwards to say Jesus taught Calvinism.

However, I do think it is consistent to say that Calvin taught Christianity.

That's all I've got for you today. Thank you so much for checking in. Hey, don't forget—the new book is dropping around Thanksgiving/Black Friday 2025. Check the link in the description. Thanks for watching!