

Calvinism – Why I have a bias against it

By Lowell Snow

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“More coffee Mr. Smith?”

“Just a warm-up – thanks.”

“Aren’t you a deacon at your church?”

“Yes, we have a fine church and a young pastor. We’d love to have you come?”

“Thanks, but that’s not why I asked.”

“Is there something we can do for you?”

“Just wanted to ask about something I heard.”

“Ok.”

“Well, earlier, there were some ladies from your church having breakfast and I heard them talking about your pastor. Now I wasn’t ease-dropping. I wouldn’t do that.”

“Of course.”

“I can’t help hearing things you know and if I can help, well, that’s just the kind of person I am.”

“Certainly.”

“Mr. Smith, I think a lot of folks in town would be willing to help with this if they just knew about it.”

“What exactly were the ladies talking about?”

“Your pastor’s problem. It’s very sad. Especially with young kids and all.”

“The pastor’s problem?”

“I think a lot of people in the community would donate if he needs surgery or something.”

“You must have misunderstood. Our pastor isn’t sick.”

“You don’t know about his brain tumor? It’s terminal.”

“You heard some ladies from our church say our pastor had a terminal brain tumor? If that were true; I would know about it.”

“I guess he’s keeping it a secret. They said he got it while he was in seminary, but didn’t tell anyone because he was afraid they’d worry about it or not even call him as pastor. What a man of God.”

“A brain tumor?”

“Well, they didn’t actually call it a brain tumor, but it was some kind of problem in his brain and I know that they said it was getting worse and he wouldn’t last long.”

“I don’t know...”

“They even talked about the symptoms.”

“Symptoms?”

“They said it affects his personality and ministry.”

“How’s that?”

“Like I said, I wasn’t ease-dropping so I didn’t hear everything, but it must take all of his time and energy just to deal with his disease because he’s not able to get out and witness to folks like the pastors you’ve had before.”

“Oh. That problem.”

“Yes, and Mr. Smith. They even knew the name of it. It sounds terrible. Do you know if it’s contagious? They called it Calvinism.”

Calvinism is becoming an issue of consequence in many SBC churches. It’s been taught to seminary students for centuries, but it’s certainly become more *contagious* in Baptist seminaries in the last decade or so. And with good reason. The theological pendulum had swung way too far toward easy salvation, entertaining worship, and a low (friendly) view of God. Calvinism is a very logical antivenin for those toxic extremes.

But, the cure may be as dangerous as the venom. The *problem* with Calvinism is not so much the theology that’s taught in seminary, but what it becomes when it hits the street – The laymen’s doctrine of, ‘What will be; will be.’

Like ‘Once saved, always saved’ that has become a deadly dilution of the Biblical doctrine of security of the believer; ‘what will be; will be’ is the equally deadly corruption of Biblical predestination.

Seminary students tend to have a lot of practice in dealing with abstract ideas. The average church member is just the opposite. For them, day to day life is very concrete – ‘what is; is’.

A seminary student may be able to accept two contradictory abstract truths in their mind at once – like: God has all ready decided who will be saved, but we should go into all the world telling everyone about Jesus. For a concrete minded, get-up and-go-to-work-everyday church member; that’s a lot of wasted effort and money.

Another contradictory abstract is that every moment of our lives is pre-determined yet we are responsible for our actions. Try telling that to your boss when you habitually show up late for work. The problem is not Calvinistic systematic theology; the big problem that scares the average Baptist laymen is the way they’ve seen it applied in people’s lives.

For instance; some folks that habitually live on welfare, spending their days eating candy bars and watching Opra, will tell you, “What will be; will be.” In their mind, this is the life chosen by God for them. Predestination, as they practice it, has excused them from responsibility.

These people have likely never heard the term Calvinism, but somewhere in their generational past the tenets of Calvinism were taught and then, over time, misapplied.

This is why most Baptists have a bias against Calvinism. Whether it’s a worthy systematic, is not the most important issue for people in the pew. How it’s applied in the lives of believers is.

Most of our forefathers saw this and steered their congregations away from the term *Calvinism* and from teaching the Bible from any man conceived systematic. Even if they agreed with much or even all of Calvin’s conclusions; they taught doctrines straight from the pages of scripture.

Teach and preach the whole Bible from beginning to end. That’s the Baptist way and it will render void the extreme teachings and applications of Calvinism. Whenever Baptists see any commentator, living or dead, coming between them and the Holy Bible, they start getting nervous. And well we should.