

CALVINISM  
AND  
*free Will*



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# Calvinism and Free Will

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# Introduction

Calvinism is a theological system based on the foundational belief that the Bible says God chooses whom to save (that is, who will be granted eternal existence in heaven), because human beings are rendered so incapacitated by sin as to be incapable of ever choosing to accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> The rest of their teachings flow from this point as logical and necessary conclusions, resulting in the belief that man<sup>2</sup> is completely and utterly evil, to the point where even a person's most altruistic thoughts are considered "sinful".<sup>3</sup>

While the belief that there can be no such thing as free will is not limited to subsets of Christianity (each of which would strongly object to being so designated, believing their system to be true, mainstream Christianity), Christians cannot be expected to begin with a worldview antithetical to their own; Calvinists themselves would wholeheartedly agree to this, since they classify themselves as presuppositionalists.<sup>4</sup> Yet at the same time, Calvinism relies heavily on philosophy and logic. So I will first examine the philosophy of free will within the presuppositional framework, and then focus on specific Calvinist teachings.

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<sup>1</sup>[Calvinism Defined, see Total Depravity](#) (PDF)

<sup>2</sup>"man" is used in this document as a generic reference to humanity, to people in general

<sup>3</sup>[Calvin— first sermon on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ](#), approx. paragraph 17

<sup>4</sup>[Apologetics: A Summary of Positions](#) (PDF) has a handy chart comparing four major philosophical viewpoints



# Defining Choice

## What does it mean to have the power of choice?

To choose is to express preference for one path over another. So for choice to be possible, there must be (1) more than one path, and (2) the existence of preference. In order for preference to be expressed, there must be causation: one or more determining factors. But some would object that these determining factors beg the question, that is, the determining factors **are** the choices. But where did the determining factors come from? There must be a First Cause.



# Does God have a free will?

Answering this question requires an understanding of how choice is exercised.

God is self-existent, the First Cause. His nature is defined by certain characteristics, but they had no cause. God does indeed have a will which is subject to no other, but it cannot violate his nature, the essence of his being. So in one sense his will is free in that it is not affected by anything outside himself, yet in another it is not free in that it is limited by his character. God's character determines the limitations of his will, or to put it another way, God's will is accountable to his nature. So will and nature are two separate things. We can think of nature as a kind of fence around the will, a limiting factor that nonetheless allows autonomy within its parameters.

But God's will is not **caused** by his nature. God willed to create the universe, but his nature did not compel or force him to do so. There is nothing in God's character that forced him to act. But if every choice must have a cause (otherwise choice would be impossible), then what caused God to create the universe?

There must be two types of causation: **event** and **agent**. Event causation would be where one event causes another, and agent causation would be primary— in the nature of the agent. In other words, there is no **event** required to cause a **primary** choice— an act of will. God acts independently from, but limited by, his nature. He is an agent, a sentient being, a primary cause.



# Does man have a free will?

Is it possible that while God may have a free will that man does not?

We are given by God, with no choice of our own:

- existence
- sentience (self-awareness)
- accountability to God
- mortality
- character/personality
- abilities/talents/intelligence
- environment

So although our choices are limited by those parameters, we still have the power of choice within them. But what if there really are no choices, and man is not a free moral agent? This would be the logical conclusion:

**The power of choice, and thus free will, is an illusion.**

We don't know why we like one car and not another, why we choose the path in life that we do, why we do or decide anything at all. Created, finite beings can be nothing more than stimulus-response entities. Apart from God, there is no such thing as an act of will. Yet at the same time, God exhorts us to make the right choices. Why? Because we are designed to respond to exhortation. Likewise, we preach the Gospel only because God designed people to respond to the Gospel, and we must preach it in order to elicit the response. We 'plant seeds' simply because we are commanded to, and we have no choice.

Without the power of choice, my personal growth as a Christian is simply a pre-programmed reaction to many pre-programmed stimuli. The whole of human history is just a giant reaction

to the action of God. Understanding this, people will react exactly as they are programmed to react: either to condemn God as unfair or to worship him as Lord. But if those who worship him are saved without merit, then those who don't are condemned without merit. And yet there we are, either in heaven conscious of our happiness, or in hell conscious of our suffering. But neither can stand in judgment of God for his fate, since God is sovereign and above reproach. As it says in Romans 9:20, "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

No one would argue whether God has the **power** to do this. The question is whether he actually **did** it, and whether limited human free will violates (is mutually exclusive of) the sovereignty of God, as Calvinism insists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Calvinism Defined, see Limited Atonement

# Is man accountable for his choices?

**Accountability cannot be separated from free will.**

Adam and Eve are examples of sentient beings exercising free will without an inherited mortality or “sin nature” (otherwise God would be the author of sin). Made in “the image of God”, they were agents with the power to choose within the limitations they encountered. Yet unless one wishes to claim God did in fact create them with a “sin nature”, they cannot explain what caused them to sin. And if “nature” did not cause *their* sin, then why is it claimed as the cause for anyone else’s sin? Regardless, sin did not turn Adam and Eve into non-agents. Sinners are **still** said by the Bible to be made in God’s image,<sup>6</sup> the image of a sentient being.

And it is pure sophistry to claim that even if God created man with a sin nature (or only allowed free will to Adam and Eve but none of their offspring), man alone is held responsible for sinning. It is on a par with claiming that if I rigged a car to explode at 20 mph, that I was not responsible for the explosion when someone drove it that speed. Yet this is what Calvinism teaches; though man is born in sin and can do nothing else, he is still solely responsible for “willingly” sinning, and that somehow God does not violate anyone’s free will when saving them.<sup>7</sup> This is nothing but a philosophical shell game.

So since the Bible definitely says **yes** to the question of man’s accountability (Calvinism acknowledges and strongly emphasizes this), and since we cannot be held accountable for that which we are powerless to choose or reject, then we must conclude that man has a free will within the limitations God sets. This no more violates the concept of sovereignty than when a schoolteacher allows students to largely do what they choose within the confines of a fenced playground under basic behavioral rules. God has the sovereign right to allow us the free will to either accept salvation or reject it.

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<sup>6</sup>James 3:9

<sup>7</sup>**God’s Grace or the Free Will of Man**, quoting Spurgeon: “God does not violate the human will when he saves men. They are not converted against their will, but their will itself is converted.”



# Summary

If I do not have a free will, then nothing matters. What will happen will happen, and I have nothing to say about it— and thus no accountability. Since **accountability cannot be separated from free will**, then to be held accountable is to have a free will. In other words, **I am accountable, therefore I have a free will**. If this is not the case, then there is no escaping the fact that we are mere puppets on strings.

If I have a free will, then I am responsible for my choices and I am accountable to God. I must act upon what I understand the Bible to say, and it says I must choose— between God and self, life and death, obedience and rebellion. I cannot control the parameters, but there are two paths open to me. So I, a sentient being with two paths in view, have the responsibility to choose and to accept the consequences of my choice.

This in no way usurps the sovereignty of God, who could have made me a mere responder to stimuli if he so chose, giving me eternal bliss or eternal suffering as he saw fit. He has the power and right to do as he pleases, but this does not require him to do as he pleases. In fact, it pleased him to give me a choice of whether or not to willingly bow to him. And since his nature limits his will, and his nature is just and fair, and his standards cannot be lower than ours, then it follows that God would not do that which even we recognize as unjust or unfair. Are we then judging God by our standards? No, we are following his own standards. To assign to God a lower standard of fairness is to insult his very nature.



# Examination of specific claims of Calvinism

Now we apply the principles of choice and free will to specific teachings.

## Claim:

God will save whoever chooses to come to him, but everyone's nature is depraved to the point of being unable to so choose. God must therefore change a person's nature to be capable of making the choice.

“Our inability to come, therefore, isn't like a physical handicap which we could not be held responsible for but, rather, a moral bent, a disposition of the affections which is naturally hostile to God, a **willful** hostility. Therefore we are responsible and culpable for our rebellion — and even more culpable now since Jesus extended forgiveness to all who would believe through His self-sacrifice. This leaves people with no excuse for their rebellion. Thus the Reformed understanding of the gift of eternal life to all who **would** believe is nothing less than genuine. If we do not repent and trust in Christ it is because of our **willful** unbelief, not because anyone is holding us back. Those who **refuse** to come could come to Jesus if they **wanted** to. God does not ultimately restrain people from wanting to come, it is **by their own will** that they refuse Him.” (a compilation of quotes, likely from [monergism.com](http://monergism.com) as I recall; **emphasis mine**)

## Objections:

Logically, **free will and not free will cannot both be true at the same time**, and **free will and accountability cannot be separated**. We cannot be held accountable for our **inability** to come to God. It is, in fact, **very much** like a physical handicap. To scold a person bound to a wheelchair for not getting out for daily walks is exactly the same as holding the morally depraved accountable for their inability to come to God. Will is limited by nature, but if we are so limited in nature (depraved) that we cannot choose between acceptance and rejection of

the Gospel, then we cannot be held accountable because we do not have the capacity to choose.

**A gift is not a wage.** Nothing can be both a gift and a wage. I didn't earn any part of my salvation, because it's impossible to merit or earn a gift. I did not deserve or earn the offer of salvation, I could only accept it or reject it, which is **not** a 'work'. I made a choice based upon known consequences, and chose the path according to my preference, which was to live eternally in heaven. **Faith and works are continually contrasted in the Bible**, so Calvinism cannot call our putting faith in Jesus a 'work' or 'synergism' (working with God for salvation).

**Claim:**

*(probably same source as previous quote)*

1. **Repentance and faith are the free acts of men.** Every person who so responds to the gospel call does so because he truly desires to do so. God does not repent or believe for anyone. We must personally and willingly trust in the person and work of Christ in order to be saved.
2. **All persons must repent and believe the gospel in order to be saved.** The Bible from cover to cover teaches that no one can be saved without this.
3. **Every person who repents and believes the gospel will be saved.** In other words, whosoever responds to the gospel command will be received by the Father. It is our belief that the gospel requires us to declare to ALL HUMANITY that Jesus laid down his life for the forgiveness of sins to ALL who would believe.
4. **Because men love darkness they are unwilling to repent and believe.**
5. **People will not desire Christ and thus understand the gospel until they first are given a new nature.** (1 Cor. 2:14; John 1:13; John 6:39, 44, 63-65; 1 Pet 1:3)."He still sets apart a favored people for Himself and restores our spiritual faculty that we might, in new affection for Him, turn and believe the gospel."

## Objections:

There is no problem with points 1 through 3, but possibly with 4 (if it means ALL, and unable), and definitely 5. **None** of the verses in point 5 hint at a new nature given before an expression of faith. **None** speak of restoring our spiritual faculty before belief.

A two-stage salvation? Affection before birth? Life before life? Are there people who are in limbo— somewhere between life and death, between quickened and saved? And do these people in limbo have the choice (free will) to either accept God or reject him? If they don't have a choice, then there is still no free will involved in salvation, and Calvinism asserts that there is. If they do, then it must invent a class of people who are quickened but lost. There is no such group of people either expressed or implied in the Bible.

In its zeal to avoid man's having any part in meriting salvation, which is Biblical, Calvinism makes the mistake of equating the acceptance of a gift with the earning of a wage, which is not Biblical. Without Christ's sacrifice it would have been impossible to be saved; with it, it is possible. This fact alone makes our salvation **completely dependent** on Jesus. God, in his sovereignty, has permitted us to choose whether to accept or reject the free gift of salvation, offered to all but accepted by only a few.

God's permissive will is not a lack of power or sovereignty; our choices are within conditions controlled by God. Calvinism already concedes God's permissive will in its arguments against universalism (God desires all to be saved, but doesn't always do what he desires). **Permission cannot exist without choice.** If there was no choice (no free will), then none of God's will would be permissive; it would all be directive.

## Specific Scriptures:

**1 Cor. 2:11-14** is not speaking about the ability to accept the Gospel message but about spiritual truths in general.

**John 1:13** is illustrating the difference between physical procreation and spiritual birth, not that people are incapable of making spiritual decisions. Verse 12 says "to all who received him he gave the right to become children of God", which is shown in opposition to those of physical birth. So this right to be spiritually born (regenerated) **follows** reception, yet Calvinism claims it **precedes** it.

**John 6:39** refers to the security of the believer, which has no bearing on the issue of predestination. Verse 44 is presumed to mean that the

Father doesn't draw everyone, even though Jesus said that he would draw "all" to himself (**John 12:32**). Verses 63-65 show his foreknowledge. The "enabled" of verse 65 are those of verse 12, the ones who are receptive. **1 Peter 1:3** is not a proof of predestination, since no one argues that birth is anything but a gift.

**Acts 16:14b** "the Lord opened her heart to respond" seems on the surface to mean that he made the choice for her. But notice that it was only after the apostles "spoke to the women" that she responded. Is it "quickenings" or faith that comes from hearing the word (**Romans 10:17**)? The phrase "opened her heart" in context most likely means that she understood the message. God can limit or increase a person's perception (see also **Luke 24:31-32**), but this does not violate free will because a person is still responsible for what they understand. The choices may be few or many, broad or restricted, but we are responsible for whatever those choices are.

**1 John 5:1** "Whoever believes. . . is born of God" is taken by Calvinism to mean that the being born caused the believing, but the word order gives me the clear impression that it is the believing that causes the being born. According to Mounce's Analytical Greek Lexicon, the word translated is [or has been] born is *gegenhntai* which is parsed as perfect passive indicative third person singular:

- Perfect: a past event with continuing action
- passive: action done to subject by another
- indicative: shows a fact
- third person: he/she/it
- singular: one subject

But the NIV, KJV, NASB, ASV, and Darby all translate it as "is born"; the only versions I could find translating it as "has been born" are Young's and the NET Bible. "Is born" to me means that I was born once in the past and continue in that condition, which is in accordance with the Greek perfect tense. "Has been born" carries the meaning of having been born once in the past but not necessarily that this condition continues, so personally I think the phrase should read "is born".

The big issue, though, is **exactly when** in the past the action happened. To say that the Greek tense shows that being born happened

before belief begs the question. Here again, the fact that the sentence mentions first belief, then birth, would give more weight to identifying the timing of events as belief and then birth.

**John 5:21** “is Jesus Himself clearly exercising sovereignty on whom He will grant the spiritual resurrection: ‘For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will’”. **But to whom does he will?** The answer is found in **2 Peter 3:9**, “The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”. To read anything else into that verse— that **any** and **all** refer only to those chosen by God to be saved— begs the question (see also **John 12:32** discussion above).

**John 10:16**— Is evangelism making sheep or gathering sheep? The Calvinistic view, of course, is that the sheep already exist but are not yet ‘gathered’, meaning there are people who are regenerated but not yet saved. On the other hand, there’s verses 9 and 10: “I am the gate; whoever enters through me **will be** saved. . . I have come that they **may have** life. . .”. Obvious emphasis on will be and may have, which means they’re not “alive” yet, and thus not “regenerated”. Who are the “other sheep”? They are Gentiles, the ones who are “not of this fold”. So Jesus is saying that he will make the two “folds” into one; he will extend salvation not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

Calvinism claims that the spiritually dead cannot make spiritual choices, and thus choose life. But in **Deut. 30:19** Israel is told that the moral choice between life and death was before them, and that they should choose life. Why the admonishment to choose life if no choice were possible? **Romans 1:21** shows the ungodly knowing God but rejecting him; **Romans 2:8** speaks of them rejecting the truth; **Romans 5:18** speaks of both the condemnation and justification of **all**, not just some or many. **1 John 2:2** says “And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”.

Jesus’ sacrifice was God’s love and holiness working together. It is a complete act in itself, satisfying God’s holiness and demonstrating his love for all. The Cross was necessary even if not one soul ever accepted it, because justice had to be met and love had to be proven. Those two things having been completed by God alone, nothing else is needed or possible on our part. This is the point at which some would say “everybody’s going to heaven”, but **available** salvation is not the same as **accepted** salvation. We have no part in our salvation, but we can

choose to accept it or reject it. In so doing, we are not working with God, we are simply accepting him.

Salvation is purely a gift. But for a gift to be exchanged, acceptance must be made. Does this mean that the giver “works with” the receiver, or that the receiver “has a part in” the gift? No, the acceptance of a gift is simply a choice. The receiver could not earn the gift or it would no longer be a gift but a wage. The giver earned the item to be given but was under no obligation to offer it to anyone. When a man proposes to a woman, he is motivated by love to spend money on a ring. He then offers this ring he paid for to her, not requiring her to accept it, but simply offering it. She is free to choose either way. In accepting it, she has not earned it or had any part in its purchase. So it is with salvation.

Calvinism says: “Regeneration (the new birth) both precedes and elicits faith in Christ. The only reason you were able to receive Christ was because you were first “made alive” or “quickened” by the Holy Spirit when you were regenerated.”

But to say that regeneration (the new birth) precedes faith is to say that **birth precedes birth!** Since it is faith that saves me, and since the moment of salvation is the moment I am reborn, then the new birth cannot precede faith. **Romans 10:9** says, “if you confess. . . and believe. . . you will be saved”. **Hebrews 11:6** says that “without faith it is impossible to please God”, yet Calvinism proposes a ‘regeneration’ without faith. In **John 3:15** Jesus says that whoever believes has eternal life. Therefore, **whoever does not believe does not have life**. In other words, to not believe is to be dead, so life (the new birth) cannot precede belief.

Can God love the dead? **John 3:16** says that he loved the **world**, not that he only loved the **living**.<sup>8</sup> The world is always contrasted with God’s people, so it refers to the lost, i.e., the dead. **John 3:17** says that “God sent his son into the world so that it might [made it possible] be saved”. The lost, or dead, have the opportunity to be saved. **Romans 5:8** says that Christ died for us while we were still sinners— while we were still dead (see also **Eph. 2:1**)— and that this was in demonstration of his love for us, the dead! So the Bible says that God loves the dead.

Now if God can love and die for the dead, he can certainly offer them a gift: the Gift of Life (when you think about it, to whom else

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<sup>8</sup>And there is no fine print defining “all” to mean “all sorts of”.

could life be offered?). To say that he cannot is to limit God to our finite understanding. Yes, in human terms, gifts and love are not offered to the dead, but this is God we're talking about. The analogy of human love and giving is meant to illustrate the fact that the exchange of a gift does not involve works of any kind.

To say that only Adam was truly made in God's image (had the true power of choice) is to say that none of his offspring are made in God's image—in contradiction of **Genesis 9:6** and **James 3:9**. It also means that there was no point in God giving us his Word, or filling that Word with exhortations to choose, strive, contend, etc., for the results are predetermined by God and will come to pass regardless. The fact that God's Word exists and tells me to make choices is clear indication to me that I in fact do have the power to truly choose, not simply to react.

### Objections to Calvinism's TULIP

- Total Depravity
- Unconditional Election
- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

### Total Depravity

It is logically necessary to conclude that if man is utterly incapable of choosing to accept salvation, then God must literally "elect" each person that is to be saved. All the other points depend completely upon Total Depravity (more accurately, Total Inability), being both unnecessary and unable to stand without it. While some Calvinists do not hold to all five points, it is not logical to accept less than that as long as the first point is accepted. So if there is no such thing as Total Inability, then the whole system of Calvinism falls.

Man is incapable of saving himself in whole or in part. But **total** depravity is not taught in Scripture. There is not the slightest hint in Genesis of the alleged death of man's spirit, which is a glaring omission for the very passage that allegedly establishes it. That man became physically mortal no one would deny. But where is any contextual support for a figurative, spiritual meaning for "death" in that passage? It is

conspicuous by its absence. Neither Adam nor Eve were cursed, only the serpent and the ground. Calvinism must rely upon pulling doctrine from poetic passages and generally ignoring the context of many others in order to claim spiritual death. And what of Romans 6?

5 If we have been united with him in a **death like his**, we will certainly also be united with him in a **resurrection like his**. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that **the body ruled by sin** might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (TNIV, emphasis mine)

What kind of death did Jesus die? Was it physical or spiritual? Since Paul likens our death and resurrection to that of Jesus, and since no one would dare claim Jesus died spiritually, then the only choice we have here is to understand that Paul is talking about the physical, especially since he speaks of “the body ruled by sin”. And what of the fact that we are said to have “died” to sin? To take the Calvinist interpretation of it being spiritual, then it would follow that the regenerated believer is utterly incapable of sinning!

It should be obvious that the unsaved are not as literally dead as Calvinism would have us believe. They cannot claim that the lost are just as incapable of choice as the physically dead, while also claiming that the regenerated “elect” are still capable of sinning. Either death means complete and utter incapacitation, or it means having a broken relationship. The latter has support as a common expression in the first century, cited even by Paul in Rom. 6:11: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” But the former would have us believe that the lost are too dead to choose good but not dead enough to keep them from choosing evil.

In practice, the degree of deadness seems to depend completely upon the point being argued. For example, if someone says the lost can choose life, the Calvinist response is that a dead body can do nothing. But if someone says that there is ample proof of lost people doing good things, the Calvinist response is that people are not always as evil as they could be. This glaring double-standard is required in order for Total Inability to stand, since it really isn't as “total” as claimed.

## Unconditional Election

Rom. 8:29— “For those God foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed** to the likeness of his son”— does **not** say “predestined to be elect”. The “elect” are those who choose to accept the gift of salvation, and God has known from eternity past who that would be; this is the meaning of foreknowledge.<sup>9</sup> These are, then, through no choice or power of their own, predestined to conform to Jesus.

## Limited Atonement

This is perhaps the weakest of the points, rejected by many Calvinists. To take a verse such as John 3:16 to mean less than what it says requires the redefinition of key words: “the world” becomes “all people without distinction instead of all people without exception”;<sup>10</sup> “whosoever” becomes “the ones God chose”; Rom. 5:18-19 requires a ream of fine print to keep redefining “all” and “many” to conform to Calvinist theology.

But the more disturbing implication of this point is what it does to the blood of Christ. To call it limited is to reduce it to something unworthy of the infinite God. If Jesus had shed a mere drop of his sinless blood it would have been enough! It is not the **quantity** but the **quality** of that blood that paid for all sin for all time.<sup>11</sup>

Some Calvinists would respond that while the atonement is sufficient for all, it is only efficient for the elect. If this is the case, they are agreeing with the non-Calvinist view which states that Jesus died for all but only those who accept His death on their behalf are saved, since salvation is by faith. This is clearly not limited **atonement** but limited **salvation**; the key difference is that the Calvinist attributes this limit to God’s choosing, while the non-Calvinist attributes it to individual acceptance or rejection of the gospel.

## Irresistible Grace

Grace is not a force to be resisted, but a bestowing of kindness from the greater to the lesser. In Romans 6:14 it is contrasted with law,

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<sup>9</sup>A common objection is that God cannot foreknow without fore-ordaining; that is, God directly and deliberately causes all that he foreknows. But how much divine foreknowledge is required in order to predict the outcome of a game that you rigged? To cause is not foreknowledge at all. Divine foreknowledge is knowing precisely that which God did **not** cause.

<sup>10</sup>**Election**, about paragraph 12.

<sup>11</sup>1 John 2:2, Heb. 7:27, 9:12, 26, 10:10

so grace can also be defined as freedom from the law. Those in this current dispensation of the church age (see Eph. 3:2) who accept this gift from God are no longer under bondage to the Law. Without this gift we would have no hope of salvation; therefore, our hope of salvation is totally dependent upon God. We are saved by placing our faith in the grace of God instead of in our own abilities. To call it irresistible is to make God more like a predator who selects his bride by brainwashing her to love him. There is no other conclusion for this point to come to, and it shows the ridiculous implications that Total Inability brings us to. And of course there are scriptures such as Acts 7:51 which clearly speak of people resisting the Holy Spirit.

The Calvinist would respond that they do not say every influence of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but that the Holy Spirit is able to overcome all resistance. Yet this does not change the problem, only the timing. Regardless of exactly **when** God overcomes a person's resistance does not change the fact of that inevitable outcome. So this counter-claim is mere semantics. It is an attempt to redefine its own terminology when confronted with obvious scriptural proof against it.

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

In a logical fallacy rather like the phrase "survival of the fittest", Calvinism teaches that the ones who persevere in faith must be the ones God chose or elected. But rather than resorting once again to grotesquely elevating the sovereignty of God above his nature, the simple explanation is that the security of the believer is due to the unique promises of God for this age. Neither before the "church" nor after it do we see guaranteed salvation granted to anyone who puts their faith in God. No other group of people in any period of history is said to have the Holy Spirit indwelling individuals as a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance".<sup>12</sup>

And yes, once this saving faith is placed in Jesus, it is secured by the power of God instead of ourselves.<sup>13</sup> Is this a violation of free will? Yes it is, but who would complain about being kept from falling away due to the pressures and temptations of life? How is that unjust, and how else would eternal life be guaranteed? There is an infinite gulf between decreeing that people are born in sin and then blaming them for it, and making it impossible to change one's mind once that choice is made. Do

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<sup>12</sup>2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:14

<sup>13</sup>1 Peter 1:5

we complain about not having more than one chance at life?<sup>14</sup> That is no different from crying foul if God prevents us from changing our mind after we have chosen.

Some Calvinists respond by contrasting this point with a more extreme minority view among non-Calvinists, that of “Free Grace”, which also has various sub-groups.<sup>15</sup> Both of these views must ignore or marginalize some scriptures. But Calvinists themselves have stated that even the most outwardly-saved person can never be sure of their election.<sup>16</sup> So in examining the details of this point we find that it actually denies assurance.

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<sup>14</sup> Heb. 9:27

<sup>15</sup> Free Grace defined

<sup>16</sup> *Iustitia Dei* vol. 2, Cambridge University Press (1986), p. 114., quoted online at [Persevering Most Assuredly](#)



# Conclusion

The Bible says that:

- Salvation is through faith in the Gospel of Christ.
- We are accountable for our choices, therefore we have a free will.
- God loves us all and offers a gift to us, neither of which depends on us.

God has always known who would ultimately put their faith in him. He is sovereign and controls the parameters, but within those parameters we are free to make choices. And free will has no more difficulty with the question of why God bothered with all this human history than does Calvinism.

But the biggest question is this: what purpose is there in dogmatically teaching, sometimes with much hostility, that God chooses who will be saved? It has no bearing on what gospel message is given, nor does it produce better quality Christians. It does nothing to honor the sovereignty of God and in fact ultimately dishonors it by negating his justice and love. It cheapens the blood of Jesus and requires the skills of a tax lawyer to decipher all the invisible fine print required to make scriptures that refute it say what they do not. And it drives some away from the hope of salvation by presenting God as more like Satan or Molech who would throw babies into the flames of hell “for his good pleasure”. To be joyful that God chose us is like being relieved at not being picked out for torture by a sadistic captor. How could we eternally praise one who, while showing mercy to us personally, shows none whatsoever to many more?

The gospel as presented in scripture is quite simple: Jesus is God in the flesh who died for all sin and rose again. All who put their trust in this Jesus are given the Spirit as a guarantee of salvation, but need the nurturing of mature believers to learn how to live in gratitude for their Savior, turning daily from all that displeases him. We do not need complicated philosophies to grasp this simple and life-giving message. God’s ways are of course above our ability to grasp, but that is why He gave us scripture. And that scripture, if we grasp it at all, is about choosing the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ alone.