

IT'S NOT ABOUT ELECTION



Why Calvinism is “Another Gospel”

Paul M. Dohse Sr.

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

~ Galatians 1:8 NKJV

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Chapter 1

The Three Pillars of Calvin's False Gospel

1. Justification is not a finished work.

2Timothy 4:1 (KJV) states the following:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

This passage makes it clear that two types of people will be judged at Christ's appearing: the alive, and the dead. The Bible also makes it clear that the spiritually alive and the spiritually dead will be judged separately:

Revelation 20:5 - But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (KJV).

The reason for two or more resurrections and two separate judgments is because justification is a settled issue for the believer. Christians will stand in a judgment that determines rewards, not a judgment that determines justification (1Cor 3:14, Luke 14:12-14 KJV).

To the contrary, Calvin believed that justification is a process for each believer that begins at our confession and continues till it is finalized at one resurrection and one judgment at the end of the ages. In other words, justification is not finished for each believer; it is a progression, or *progressive justification*.

The subject of Calvin's *progressive justification* is addressed by him in the Calvin Institutes (3.14.), and the very title of that chapter is, "The Beginning of Justification. In What Sense Progressive."

In other words, justification has a beginning, a progression, and a finalization. Calvinists that really know what Calvin believed call this the process of *objective justification*, *subjective justification*, and *final justification* or the “golden chain of salvation.” [see illustrations on p. 37]

Hence, since justification is not finished when we believe in Christ’s finished work on the cross, we must continue to do something that will not break any of the links of the golden chain from objective justification to final justification. It necessarily implies that we are part of the justification process in some way because justification progresses and is not finished.

2. Rejection of the new birth.

Furthermore, because Calvin saw salvation as progressive, he was concerned with the idea of a new birth that would enable the believer to participate in the golden chain of salvation. Since justification progresses according to Calvin, the believer cannot participate (however, because it is a “chain,” participation by the “believer” is inescapable). Therefore, in Calvin’s gospel, the believer remains totally depraved, and remains a sinner. Calvin replaced the new birth with *mortification and vivification* (Michael Horton’s Systematic Theology: pp. 661-663).

This is a perpetual daily re-salvation by faith alone in repentance and a joyful new birth EXPERIENCE. We “keep ourselves in the love of God” (CJ Mahaney, Resolved 2010) by preaching the gospel to ourselves every day and re-experiencing the joy of our original salvation. This is why Calvinists like John Piper insist that Christians who don’t experience joy are going to hell:

The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is not an 'extra' that a person might grow into after he comes to faith. Until your heart has hit upon this pursuit, your 'faith' cannot please God. It is not saving faith (*Desiring God*: p. 69).

This is because re-salvation by the same turning from sin that saved us (a turning from the old life) is followed by the original experience of salvation joy.

This makes the new birth a mere experience only. But lack of joy is considered to be evidence that the “Christian” is not partaking in mortification (the same repentance that saved us), and experiencing vivification (the original joy of our salvation).

Consequently, Calvin believed that the Christian cannot do one work that pleases God:

We must strongly insist on these two things: that no believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgement of God, could escape condemnation; and , moreover, that were this granted possible (though it is not), yet the act being vitiated and polluted by the sins of which it certain that the author of it is guilty, it is deprived of its merit (CI 3.14.11).

This is a contradiction to biblical imperatives to make it our goal to please God (2Cor 5:9,10), and the reality of our goodness because of the new birth that is a reality and not a mere experience (Romans 15:14).

3. There is life in the law.

Galatians 3:21 states the following:

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

Calvinism teaches that a perfect keeping of the law must be maintained in order to justify sinners. This can be clearly seen from the aforecited CI 3.14.11, and several other things Calvin said in the same section. Hence, the law can give life if someone keeps it perfectly. This is an important element of Calvin’s gospel called the “double imputation” of Christ’s “passive obedience” to the cross and “active obedience” to the law. The famous Calvinist Gresham Machen said that there is no hope without this take on double imputation. As long as the Christian continually revisits the same gospel that saved them afresh, the perfect obedience of Christ to the law is imputed to the believer and he/she remains justified. The problem with this view is: who keeps the law isn’t the issue, the law cannot give life.

In contrast, the Bible states that we are justified apart from the law (Rom 3:21, 28, Rom 4:15, Rom 5:13, Rom 6:14,15, Rom 7:1, 5,6, 8-11). The law now informs our sanctification (Rom 3:21, Rom 8:3,4,7, Gal 3:21, 1Thess 4:3-8), but has no part in justification. The biblical “double imputation” is not from Christ only; it is the imputation of God’s righteousness to us, and the imputation of our sins to Christ.

Chapter 2

Calvin's Definition of Justification

A good place to start in understanding Calvin's all-out assault on biblical truth is his definition of righteousness. As with most of the Reformers, he defined righteousness as a perfect keeping of the law. Sounds very logical, but once we are drawn into that definition and accept its premise—we are in grave danger of being led astray. Let's begin by reading some citations from the Calvin Institutes on this point:

But in order that a sense of guilt may urge us [**Christians**] to seek for pardon, it is of importance to know how our being instructed in the Moral Law renders us more inexcusable [**the need for perpetual pardon**]. If it is true, that a perfect righteousness is set before us in the Law, it follows, that the complete observance of it is perfect righteousness in the sight of God; that is, a righteousness by which a man may be deemed and pronounced righteous at the divine tribunal. Wherefore Moses, after promulgating the Law, hesitates not to call heaven and earth to witness, that he had set life and death, good and evil, before the people. Nor can it be denied, that the reward of eternal salvation, as promised by the Lord, awaits the perfect obedience of the Law...(CI 2.7.3).

Therefore, if we look merely to the Law, the result must be despondency, confusion, and despair, seeing that by it we are all cursed and condemned, while we are kept far away from the blessedness which it holds forth to its observers. Is the Lord, then, you will ask, only sporting with us? Is it not the next thing to mockery, to hold out the hope of happiness, to invite and exhort us to it, to declare that it is set before us, while all the while the entrance to it is precluded and quite shut up? I answer, Although the promises, in so far as they are conditional, depend on a perfect obedience of the Law, which is nowhere to be found, they have not, however, been given in vain (CI: 2.7.4).

To declare that we are deemed righteous, solely because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own, is just to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ.... And so indeed it is; for in order to appear in the presence of God for salvation **[to stand in a future judgment to determine salvation]**, we must send forth that fragrant odour, having our vices covered and buried by his perfection. (CI: 3.11.23).

For the meaning is—As by the sin of Adam we were alienated from God and doomed to destruction, so by the obedience of Christ we are restored to his favour as if we were righteous (CI: 2.17.3).

We see from these quotations with emphasis added that a perfect keeping of the law is the definition of righteousness. This would be true if Christians did not remain in their mortal bodies for a time, but biblically, imperfect obedience in sanctification does not exclude the truth that we are presently righteous in the truest sense. Therefore, Calvin's definition of righteousness is fundamentally flawed and the problems caused thereof can be seen in these same citations.

First, note that the law must be kept perfectly by Christ in order for us to be “pronounced righteous” at “the divine tribunal.” And: “for in order to appear in the presence of God for salvation.” And what must we do to procure the perfect obedience of Christ to fulfill the law?

But in order that a sense of guilt may urge us **[Christians]** to seek for pardon, it is of importance to know how our being instructed in the Moral Law renders us more inexcusable **[the need for perpetual pardon]**.

In Calvinism, the purpose of the law is to drive the Christian to guilt for the purpose of seeking “pardon.” This pardon, for the Christian, is perpetual because it “renders us more inexcusable.” What kind of pardon? Pardon for the same salvation that we originally received. Not forgiveness in sanctification to restore intimacy with Christ and the Father, but forgiveness for salvation. Calvin makes this clear:

Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the Church (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death....(CI: 3.14.11).

So, as the law of God shows us our continual need for pardon, we seek pardon for salvation not just once, but perpetually. This continually satisfies the righteous demand of the law which is perfection. In a future judgment, we must present "that fragrant odour, having our vices covered and buried by his perfection."

What work must we do to keep our salvation? We must use the Bible to see our continual need for pardon and seek continual re-salvation. As the New Calvinist mantra of our day states: "We must preach the gospel to ourselves every day." Robert Brinsmead, the father of present-day New Calvinism, stated it this way:

After a man hears the conditions of acceptance with God and eternal life, and is made sensible of his inability to meet those conditions, the Word of God comes to him in the gospel. He hears that Christ stood in his place and kept the law of God for him. By dying on the cross, Christ satisfied all the law's demands. The Holy Spirit gives the sinner faith to accept the righteousness of Jesus. Standing now before the law which says, "I demand a life of perfect conformity to the commandments," the believing sinner cries in triumph, "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying; mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, and suffered, and died as He did . . ." (Luther). The law is well pleased with Jesus' doing and dying, which the sinner brings in the hand of faith. Justice is fully satisfied, and God can truly say: "This man has fulfilled the law. He is justified."

We say again, only those are justified who bring to God a life of perfect obedience to the law of God. This is what faith does—it brings to God the obedience of Jesus Christ. By faith the law is fulfilled and the sinner is justified.

On the other hand, the law is dishonored by the man who presumes to bring to it his own life of obedience. The fact that he thinks the law will be satisfied with his "rotten stubble and straw" (Luther) shows what a low estimate he has of the holiness of God and what a high estimate he has of his own righteousness. Only in Jesus Christ is there an obedience with which the law is well pleased. Because faith brings only what Jesus has done, it is the highest honor that can be paid to the law (Rom. 3:31). (As cited in The Truth About New Calvinism: Paul M. Dohse Sr.; pp. 101,102).

Therefore, in Calvinism, the Christian life is a continual re-salvation by faith alone as we see our sinfulness in the Bible. The goal is to use the law we cannot keep to reveal our corruption more and more which drives us to repentance. When we repent, Christ's perfect obedience to the law is presented to the Father and our justification is maintained. This is the gospel of Calvinism. It is working by faith alone to maintain our salvation by acknowledging that we cannot keep the law; for all practical purposes, antinomianism. What are the differences between "I can't keep the law," "I won't keep the law," or "I don't have to keep the law"? Calvinism's version of antinomianism is the idea that an antinomian believes that the law doesn't have to be kept. They piously object that it must be kept while not mentioning that we can't keep it—Christ must keep it for us.

Righteousness is not defined by a perfect keeping of the law. The very Reformed definition of righteousness is egregiously flawed. It's works salvation. If it is true, we are not justified APART FROM THE LAW:

Romans 3:19 - Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

Abraham was justified apart from the law—the law didn't come until 430 years later (GAL 3:17,18). He was declared righteous because he believed God. Hence, GOD'S righteousness APART from the law has been manifested. If Christ had to keep the law perfectly for our righteousness—that's NOT apart from the law, and moreover, Abraham could not have been justified. “But Christ's perfect obedience was imputed to Abraham when He died on the cross.” Then what is the point that Paul is making in Galatians? Why make a point in regard to when the law came? In addition, Christ had not yet obeyed the law perfectly when Abraham did the following:

James 2:20 - Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

The Reformed always make it a point to state that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. This is important to them (although the Bible always refers to it as the righteousness of God) because it imputes the perfect obedience of Christ (His life when He came as a man) to us so that the law is fulfilled for our salvation. But again, the Scriptures state:

Galatians 3:11 - Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Galatians 2:16 - yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

If Christ lived a perfect life on earth to fulfill the law so that it could be imputed to us for righteousness—THAT’S NOT RIGHTOUSNESS APART FROM THE LAW. Though Christ kept it for us, it is still righteousness based on the law.

Hence, a proper definition of righteousness is believing in God (GEN 15:6), not perfect obedience to the law. The law has no stake at all in righteousness that justifies. It informs our righteousness, but it does not affect it:

Romans 3:21 - But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

Galatians 4:21 - Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

But if Christ had to keep the law for us, we are not declared righteous apart from the law, and we are still under it albeit fulfilled by Christ. We are either under law or under grace (Romans 6:14). The Bible never states that we are still under the law and covered by grace—it’s either one or the other (Ibid). If we need the gospel of first importance just as much as we did when we were saved (a popular truism in our day), then we are still under the law which is a biblical idiom for the unsaved.

We are righteous because we have God’s seed within us via the new birth and it was attained by faith alone. Perfect law keeping is not the standard, but a DIRECTION of righteousness resulting from a born again believer fighting the remnant of sin that remains in his mortal body:

1 John 3:7 - Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

The righteous believer has a mind that serves the law, but is hindered by the remnant of sin left in mortality:

Romans 7:25 - Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

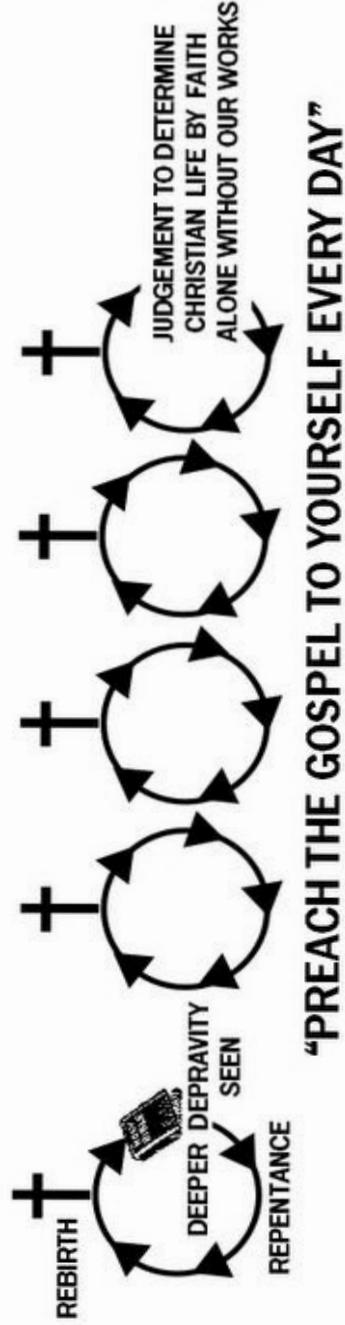
Note “I myself,” and “you, yourselves” in the following citation:

Romans 15:14 - I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

CONCLUSION

Where perfection is commanded in the Bible, the goal is being referenced, not a standard for remaining justified that has to be perpetually implemented through re-salvation. Calvinism denies that we are presently righteous, and therefore denies the biblical new birth. Jesus said we “must be born again.” To redefine the new birth is to posit another gospel. Calvinism keeps Christians under the law and propagates a gospel of perpetual re-salvation to maintain a satisfaction to the law culminating in a judgment to determine if we did so satisfactory. Therefore, assurance of salvation is on shaky ground. It also circumvents our ability to love the Lord by keeping His commandments because the standard is perfection.

JOHN CALVIN'S FALSE GOSPEL OF PROGRESSIVE JUSTIFICATION



"PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF EVERY DAY"

Chapter 3

Calvin's Gospel of Perpetual Rebirth

Simply stated, Calvinism is a false gospel because it denies that salvation is a onetime event in the life of the believer. In other words, when a person believes in Christ, all of their sins are not forgiven once and for all time. The sins we commit in our Christian life go against our salvation, so we must continually revisit the same gospel that saved us for re-forgiveness in order to maintain our salvation. This is a problem because something is required of us to keep our salvation and just standing before God. The Reformers taught that salvation as a onetime finished work is a false gospel.

In our present day which is experiencing a resurgence of the original Reformation gospel, we assume that the truism, “We must preach the gospel to ourselves everyday” is just a popular opinion about the best way to grow spiritually in our Christian lives. Not so. According to a proper understanding of Calvinism, the revisiting every day of the same gospel that saved us is necessary to maintain our salvation. “The same gospel that saved you also sanctifies you” is another popular mantra that is deceptive; a re-visitation of the gospel not only “sanctifies” you, according to Calvinism, it is a must for keeping ourselves saved according to the Reformation gospel.

This is why the Reformers redefined the biblical new birth. Instead of the new birth being a onetime event in the life of the believer, making us new creatures, they made the new birth a continual rebirth experience only needed to maintain our salvation. Another way this could be stated follows: a perpetual re-salvation, re-forgiveness experience. Contemporary Reformed theologians call this “mortification and vivification” in their systematic theology. This term refers to a *reliving of our baptism*.

Some will say, “But I don’t agree with everything Calvin believed.” That is beside the point, Calvinism represents a false gospel. Some will also say, “The term ‘Calvinism’ represents different truth than it did originally.” Apparently, this is not the case because Calvinism still calls for a re-visitation of the same belief/repentance that saved us.

John Calvin also taught that this needed re-forgiveness of sins committed in our Christian lives in order to maintain our salvation can only be found in the institutional church, and Reformed pastors have been given authority by God to forgive these sins, and such forgiveness is critical to maintaining our salvation. This was Calvin's "power of the keys."

Hence, Calvinism is no different than any other *Christ plus something we do* for salvation. In this case, a continual revisiting of the same gospel that saved us, and a continual plea for forgiveness for new sins committed in the Christian life in order to keep ourselves saved.[*p20] The Puritans who were theological descendants of John Calvin believed that when such forgiveness is granted, the perfect obedience of Christ is then applied to the Christian and his/her justification continues to be secured. They called this, "new obedience."[*p21] This means that the obedience of Christ is newly applied to the believer IF they continue to contemplate their ongoing need for salvation by continuing to seek forgiveness for new sins.

Calvinism demands a continual rebirth experience and re-salvation/re-forgiveness to keep ourselves saved. It is a false gospel.

In Contrast...

Justification is past tense and final: 1Corinthians 6:11.

Christ told Peter that Christians only need to be washed once: John 13:10.

Christ told the woman at the well that the one who partakes of the water of life will not thirst again: John 4:13,14.

Sin in the Christian life cannot separate us from grace because there is no law in justification: Romans 3:21, 28, 4:15, 5:13, 6:14, 15, 7:1, 5,6, 8-11.

Christ's obedience does not justify us or keep us justified. We were justified by the one act of His death on the cross: Hebrews 10:1-18.

Relevant Citations:

“Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the Church (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death—viz. ablution, satisfaction, expiation; in short, perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered” (The Calvin Institutes: 3.14.11).

“Theologically and more universally all must learn to say, ‘I am a sinner’ and likewise never to stop saying it until Christ’s return makes it no longer true” (Gerhard O. Forde: from his commentary of Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation).

“Where we land on these issues is perhaps the most significant factor in how we approach our own faith and practice and communicate it to the world. If not only the unregenerate but the regenerate are always dependent at every moment on the free grace of God disclosed in the gospel, then nothing can raise those who are spiritually dead or continually give life to Christ’s flock but the Spirit working through the gospel. When this happens (not just once, but every time we encounter the gospel afresh), the Spirit progressively transforms us into Christ’s image. Start with Christ (that is, the gospel) and you get sanctification in the bargain; begin with Christ and move on to something else, and you lose both” (Michael Horton: *Christless Christianity*; p. 62).

“Nor by remission of sins does the Lord only once for all elect and admit us into the Church, but by the same means he preserves and defends us in it. For what would it avail us to receive a pardon of which we were afterwards to have no use? That the mercy of the Lord would be vain and delusive if only granted once, all the godly can bear witness; for there is none who is not conscious, during his whole life, of many infirmities which stand in need of divine mercy. And truly it is not without cause that the Lord promises this gift specially to his own household, nor in vain that he orders the same message of reconciliation to be daily delivered to them” (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.21).

“To impart this blessing to us, the keys have been given to the Church (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). For when Christ gave the command to the apostles, and conferred the power of forgiving sins, he not merely intended that they should loose the sins of those who should be converted from impiety to the faith of Christ; but, moreover, that they should perpetually perform this office among believers” (The Calvin Institutes: 4.1.22).

“Secondly, This benefit is so peculiar to the Church, that we cannot enjoy it unless we continue in the communion of the Church. Thirdly, It is dispensed to us by the ministers and pastors of the Church, either in the preaching of the Gospel or the administration of the Sacraments, and herein is especially manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful. Accordingly, let each of us consider it to be his duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it. Of the public reconciliation which relates to discipline, we shall speak at the proper place” (Ibid).

*“...by new sins we continually separate ourselves, as far as we can, from the grace of God... Thus it is, that all the saints have need of the daily forgiveness of sins; for this alone keeps us in the family of God” (John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*; The Calvin Translation Society 1855. Editor: John Owen, p. 165 ¶4).

“Progressive sanctification has two parts: mortification and vivification, ‘both of which happen to us by participation in Christ,’ as Calvin notes....Subjectively experiencing this definitive reality signified and sealed to us in our baptism requires a daily dying and rising. That is what the Reformers meant by sanctification as a living out of our baptism....and this conversion yields lifelong mortification and vivification ‘again and again.’ Yet it is critical to remind ourselves that in this daily human act of turning, we are always turning not only from sin but toward Christ rather than toward our own experience or piety” (Michael Horton: *The Christian Faith; mortification and vivification*, pp. 661-663 [Calvin Inst. 3.3.2-9]).

“At conversion, a person begins to see God and himself as never before. This greater revelation of God’s holiness and righteousness leads to a greater revelation of self, which, in return, results in a repentance or brokenness over sin. Nevertheless, the believer is not left in despair,

for he is also afforded a greater revelation of the grace of God in the face of Christ, which leads to joy unspeakable. This cycle simply repeats itself throughout the Christian life. As the years pass, the Christian sees more of God and more of self, resulting in a greater and deeper brokenness. Yet, all the while, the Christian's joy grows in equal measure because he is privy to greater and greater revelations of the love, grace, and mercy of God in the person and work of Christ. Not only this, but a greater interchange occurs in that the Christian learns to rest less and less in his own performance and more and more in the perfect work of Christ. Thus, his joy is not only increased, but it also becomes more consistent and stable. He has left off putting confidence in the flesh, which is idolatry, and is resting in the virtue and merits of Christ, which is true Christian piety" (Paul Washer: *The Gospel Call and True Conversion*; Part 1, Chapter 1, heading – The Essential Characteristics Of Genuine Repentance, subheading – Continuing and Deepening Work of Repentance).

An illustration of what Paul Washer is saying can be seen on page 38 of this booklet via an illustration popular among Calvinist organizations. By focusing on sin only and God's forgiveness, the same gospel that saved us, the Christian receives a greater and greater salvation experience demonstrated by the increased size of the cross; viz, the joy of our original salvation. Again, see illustration on page 38.

*“Q87: What is repentance unto life?

A87: Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience" [the newly applied obedience of Christ in response to re-repentance] (Westminster Shorter Catechism (1674)).

“. . . forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but comes from baptism which is of perpetual duration, until we arise from the dead" (Luther's Works: American ed.; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955, vol. 34, p. 163).

“. . . Forgiveness of sins is not a matter of a passing work or action, but of perpetual duration. For the forgiveness of sins begins in baptism and remains with us all the way to death, until we arise from the dead, and leads us into life eternal. So we live continually under the remission of sins. Christ. is truly and constantly the liberator from our sins, is called our Savior, and saves us by taking away our sins. If, however, he saves us always and continually, then we are constantly sinners” (Ibid, p.164).

“On no condition is sin a passing phase, but we are justified daily by the unmerited forgiveness of sins and by the justification of God’s mercy. Sin remains, then, perpetually in this life, until the hour of the last judgment comes and then at last we shall be made perfectly righteous” (Ibid, p.167).

“For the forgiveness of sins is a continuing divine work, until we die. Sin does not cease. Accordingly, Christ saves us perpetually” (Ibid., p.190).

“Daily we sin, daily we are continually justified, just as a doctor is forced to heal sickness day by day until it is cured” (Ibid., p.191).

Chapter 4

John Calvin's Sabbath Salvation Heresy

John Calvin believed you keep yourself saved by living your Christian life according to the Old Testament Sabbath.

In what way? Answer: by not doing any works. The Christian life must be lived out as the Sabbath Day, and in the same way that working on the Sabbath was a capital offence in the Old Testament, working in the Christian life will bring spiritual death:

Ezekiel is still more full, but the sum of what he says amounts to this: that the Sabbath is a sign by which Israel might know God is their sanctifier. If our sanctification consists in the mortification of our own will, the analogy between the external sign and the thing signified is most appropriate. We must rest entirely, in order that God may work in us; we must resign our own will, yield up our heart, and abandon all the lusts of the flesh. In short, we must desist from all the acts of our mind, that God working in us, we may rest in him, as the Apostle also teaches (Heb. 3:13; 4:3, 9). [1]

And how long, and to what degree should we live out the Sabbath?

Should any expect some secret meaning in the number seven, this being in Scripture the number for perfection, it may have been selected, not without cause, to denote perpetuity. In accordance with this, Moses concludes his description of the succession of day and night on the same day on which he relates that the Lord rested from his works. Another probable reason for the number may be, that the Lord intended that the Sabbath never should be completed before the arrival of the last day. We here begin our blessed rest in him, and daily make new progress in it; but because we must still wage an incessant warfare with the flesh, it should not be consummated until the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord," (Isaiah 66:23); in other words, when God shall be "all in all,"

(1Cor. 15:28). It may seem, therefore, that the seventh day the Lord delineated to his people the future perfection of his sabbath on the last day, that by continual meditation on the sabbath, they might throughout their whole lives aspire to this perfection. [2]

In other words, we “aspire” to perfection (when we are ultimately perfected at the resurrection) “by continual meditation on the sabbath.” This brings a question to mind, “How do you not work in the Christian life?” The answer according to this doctrine: By meditating on your own sin and God’s grace and holiness, and thereby allowing God to work through you. The next question: “But how do you know when it is God’s work or your work?” Answer: Everything that you do that is a good work is done by God and only EXPERIENCED by you. All sin is your doing, and is an aid to understanding how sinful you are. All the good works experienced by you are imputed or manifested by God. And, Christians are not to live by faith alone, or in other words, live by the Sabbath for the sake of the manifestations. That would be doing something other than living by faith alone:

He, however, who has emptied himself (cf. Phil. 2:7) through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more...He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ. [3]

Christians, according to the Reformers, are completely unable to do any good work pleasing to God:

We must strongly insist on these two things: that no believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could escape condemnation; and, moreover, that were this granted to be possible (though it is not), yet the act being vitiated and polluted by the sins of which it is certain that the author of it is guilty, it is deprived of its merit. [4]

So what's the point? What's the payoff? Answer: JOY! The more we live by faith alone (Sabbath rest) in the Christian life by focusing on our sin and God's Holiness, the more we experience the joy of our original salvation. Said Luther:

Now you ask: What then shall we do? Shall we go our way with indifference because we can do nothing but sin? I would reply: By no means. But, having heard this, fall down and pray for grace and place your hope in Christ in whom is our salvation, life, and resurrection. For this reason we are so instructed-for this reason the law makes us aware of sin so that, having recognized our sin, we may seek and receive grace. Thus God »gives grace to the humble« (1 Pet. 5:5), and »whoever humbles himself will be exalted« (Matt. 23:12). The law humbles, grace exalts. The law effects fear and wrath, grace effects hope and mercy. Through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), through knowledge of sin, however, comes humility, and through humility grace is acquired... Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

This is clear from what has been said, for, according to the gospel, the kingdom of heaven is given to children and the humble (Mark 10:14,16), and Christ loves them. They cannot be humble who do not recognize that they are damnable whose sin smells to high heaven. Sin is recognized only through the law. It is apparent that not despair, but rather hope, is preached when we are told that we are sinners. Such preaching concerning sin is a preparation for grace, or it is rather the recognition of sin and faith in such preaching. Yearning for grace wells up when recognition of sin has arisen. A sick person seeks the physician when he recognizes the seriousness of his illness. Therefore one does not give cause for despair or death by telling a sick person about the danger of his illness, but, in effect, one urges him to seek a medical cure. To say that we are nothing and constantly sin when we do the best we can does not mean that we cause people to despair (unless we are fools); rather, we make them concerned about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. [5]

So, the Christian life is a cycle of seeking mercy by using the Bible (the law) to reveal our wretchedness which results in being “exalted.” It is a perpetual cycle of humbling ourselves resulting in grace (exaltation). Seek mercy—get grace—seek mercy—get grace—seek mercy—get grace.

The Reformers called this “mortification and vivification.” This occurs in the Sabbath rest:

Spiritual rest is the mortification of the flesh; so that the sons of God should no longer live to themselves, or indulge their own inclination. So far as the Sabbath was a figure of this rest, I say, it was but for a season; but insomuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world. [6]

According to the Reformers, this perpetual cycle of seeking mercy and receiving the joy of grace is in fact their definition of the new birth, and this experience is a congruent deeper and deeper realization of our sinfulness coupled with more and more consistent joy. It is a perpetual reliving of our baptism and the joy thereof. [7][8][9][10]

John Piper added some contemporary philosophical pizazz to this doctrine with his *Christian Hedonism* doctrine.

So, the pay-off is easy believeism with the JOY bonus. However, many Calvinists contend that it is really the hard and narrow way because the essence of all sin is: to avoid repentance whether unregenerate or Christian. It is the hard way of Dr. Larry Crabb’s “inside look.” It is “peeling off the layers of sin ” prescribed by CJ Mahaney. Nevertheless, the affront to the Bible command to not rejoice in evil cannot be missed here (1Cor 13:6).

Also, we must not miss the point that this is a prescription for keeping ourselves saved by living in the Reformed Sabbath:

And this emptying out of self must proceed so far that the Sabbath is violated even by good works, so long as we regard them as our own; for rightly does Augustine remark in the last chapter of the 22nd book, *De Civitate Dei*, ‘For even our good works themselves, since they are understood to be rather His than ours, are thus imputed to us for the attaining of that Sabbath, when we are still and see that He is God; for, if we attribute them to ourselves, they will be servile, whereas we are told as to the Sabbath, “Thou shalt not do any servile work in it.” [11]

In essence, this is salvation by Christ + the Reformed Sabbath Rest. It is living in a cycle of seeking knowledge of our sin in order to better appreciate the cross. Our salvation is not finished, we must “keep ourselves in the love of Christ” (CJ Mahaney). **We must keep ourselves in the Reformed Sabbath for the “attaining of that Sabbath”** (salvation).

ENDNOTES

1. The Calvin Institutes 2.8.29
2. The Calvin Institutes 2.8.30
3. Martin Luther: The Heidelberg Disputation ; thesis 24,25.
4. The Calvin Institutes 3.14.11
5. Heidelberg Disputation: thesis 16, 17.
6. The Complete Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis: Jean Calvin; translated by John King, 1844-1856. Genesis 2:1-15, section 3.
7. Michael Horton: The Christian Faith; mortification and vivification, pp. 661-663 [Calvin Inst. 3.3.2-9].
8. Paul Washer: The Gospel Call and True Conversion; Part 1, Chapter 1, heading – The Essential Characteristics Of Genuine Repentance, sub-heading – Continuing and Deepening Work of Repentance.

9. The Heidelberg Disputation Theses 24.
10. The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection of John Calvin 1844-1856: Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, Translated by John Owen | 1Peter 4:1-5, section 2.
11. The Complete Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis: Jean Calvin; translated by Charles William Bingham ,1844-1856. The Harmony of the Law: Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses | Its Repetition—Deuteronomy 5:12-15. ¶2.

Chapter 5

A Gospel of Works, Fear, and NO Assurance

For John Calvin, the Christian life is lived out in a progression of justification; viz, justification is not a onetime event that is a finished work by God alone. The Christian life starts with repentance and faith, and that not only justifies us in the beginning, it must continue to justify us throughout the course of our life. “Progressive sanctification” is really *progressive justification*. The Christian life is not lived out as a result of our salvation; we must live in the progression of salvation and stay in its status through faith and repentance alone. We must keep ourselves saved by perpetual repentance. This is the “P” in TULIP, “perseverance of the saints.” No distinction is made between repentance unto salvation and repentance as a son of God. Calvin evokes all Scriptural calls to repentance for salvation as indicative of the Christian life. Calvin cites biblical salvation verses—as verses pertaining to the Christian life throughout the Calvin Institutes.

Furthermore, Calvin insisted that Christian repentance is motivated by fear, and repentance is active, while the results of repentance, a joyful rebirth experience, is the work of God. It is a perpetual revisiting of the gospel that saved us in order to keep ourselves saved. Our only work is repenting of sin while works imputed by God to our Christian life are only experienced, and not performed.

First, Calvin defines repentance in his Institutes. Keep in mind that he is not writing about original salvation, but the Christian life. This will be confirmed after these citations:

Certain learned men, who lived long before the present days and were desirous to speak simply and sincerely according to the rule of Scripture, held that repentance consists of two parts, mortification and quickening. By mortification they mean, grief of soul and terror, produced by a conviction of sin and a sense of the divine judgment. For when a man is brought to a true knowledge of sin, he begins truly to hate and abominate sin... By quickening they mean, the comfort which is produced by faith, as when a man prostrated by a consciousness of sin, and smitten with the fear of God, afterwards beholding his goodness, and the mercy, grace, and salvation obtained through Christ, looks up, begins to breathe, takes courage, and passes, as it were, from death unto life. I admit that these terms, when rightly interpreted, aptly enough express the power of repentance; only I cannot assent to their using the term quickening, for the joy which the soul feels after being calmed from perturbation and fear. It more properly means, that desire of pious and holy living which springs from the new birth; as if it were said, that the man dies to himself that he may begin to live unto God (CI 3.33).

We must now explain the third part of the definition, and show what is meant when we say that repentance consists of two parts—viz. the mortification of the flesh, and the quickening of the Spirit (CI 3.3.8).

And for how long do we partake in this perpetual repentance (mortification) and rebirth (vivification)?

This renewal, indeed, is not accomplished in a moment, a day, or a year, but by uninterrupted, sometimes even by slow progress God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring all their inclinations to real purity, so that during their whole lives they may practice repentance, and know that death is the only termination to this warfare...It is not denied that there is room for improvement; but what I maintain is, that the nearer any one approaches in resemblance to God, the more does the image of God appear in him.

That believers may attain to it, God assigns repentance as the goal towards which they must keep running [emphasis added] during the whole course of their lives (CI 3.3.9).

Though Calvin wrote of being transformed into the “image” of God, this is part and parcel with the passive and perpetual rebirth experience by the Christian. This does not denote a change or improvement in the Christian’s nature which would lessen the need for repentance. Obviously, if you look at the chart on page 38, raising the trajectory of repentance makes the cross smaller, so repentance leading to real change is not in focus here. Calvin’s idea of transformation regards the birthing of realms which is experienced by the Christian through joy. Hence, the new birth is perpetual through the Christian’s life and is the result of perpetual repentance. We are to repent and dwell on our own depravity, and leave any quickenings or rebirth experiences to God:

He, however, who has emptied himself (cf. Phil. 2:7) through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more. It is this that Christ says in John 3:7, »You must be born anew.« To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man. To die, I say, means to feel death at hand (Martin Luther: Heidelberg Disputation, theses 24).

In obedience to God’s word we should fight to walk in the paths where he has promised his blessings. But when and how they come is God’s to decide, not ours. If they delay, we trust the wisdom of our Father’s timing, and we wait. In this way joy remains a gift, while we work patiently in the field of obedience and fight against the weeds and the crows and the rodents. Here is where joy will come. Here is where Christ will reveal himself (John 14:21). But that revelation and that joy will come when and how Christ chooses. It will be a gift... Heaven hangs on having the taste of joy in God. Therefore, it might not be so strange after all to think of fighting for this joy. Our eternal lives depend on it (John Piper: *When I Don’t Desire God*; p.43, p.34).

It is also important to note that in this construct, for the most part, repentance is something we focus on, and not something we necessarily try to do. The goal is to see our own depravity in a deeper and deeper way, and this results in a joyful rebirth experience that is totally out of our control. But yet, we must fight for this joy, or rebirth experience because “Our eternal lives depend on it.” Not only is this clearly works salvation, but it makes our eternal destiny ambiguous at best. Therefore...

Let us, therefore, embrace Christ, who is kindly offered to us, and comes forth to meet us: he will number us among his flock, and keep us within his fold. But anxiety arises as to our future state. For as Paul teaches, that those are called who were previously elected, so our Savior shows that many are called, but few chosen (Mt. 22:14). Nay, even Paul himself dissuades us from security, when he says, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,” (1 Cor. 10:12). And again, “Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee,” (Rom. 11:20, 21). In fine, we are sufficiently taught by experience itself, that calling and faith are of little value without perseverance, which, however, is not the gift of all (CI 3.24.6).

There is danger on the way to salvation in heaven. We need ongoing protection after our conversion. Our security does not mean we are home free. There is a battle to be fought (John Piper: Bethlehem Baptist Church Minneapolis, Minnesota; *The Elect Are Kept by the Power of God* October 17, 1993).

According to Calvin, fear of future judgment is one of the primary motivations for repentance in the Christians life:

By mortification they mean, grief of soul and terror, produced by a conviction of sin and a sense of the divine judgment [sec.3]... it seems to me, that repentance may be not inappropriately defined thus: A real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God; and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and the old man, and the quickening of the Spirit. In this sense are to be understood all those addresses in which the prophets first, and the apostles afterwards, exhorted the people of their time to repentance. The great object for which they labored was, to fill them with confusion for their sins and dread of the divine judgment, that they might fall down and humble themselves before him whom they had offended, and, with true repentance, retake themselves to the right path [sec.5]... The second part of our definition is, that repentance proceeds from a sincere fear of God. Before the mind of the sinner can be inclined to repentance, he must be aroused by the thought of divine judgment; but when once the thought that God will one day ascend his tribunal to take an account of all words and actions has taken possession of his mind, it will not allow him to rest, or have one moment's peace, but will perpetually urge him to adopt a different plan of life, that he may be able to stand securely at that judgment-seat. Hence the Scripture, when exhorting to repentance, often introduces the subject of judgment, as in Jeremiah, "Lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings," (Jer. 4:4)... The stern threatening which God employs are extorted from him by our depraved dispositions [sec.7] [from the CI 3.3.3-7].

Note: “our depraved dispositions” refers to Christians.

Of course, this is all in egregious contradiction to the Scriptures; viz,

1John 4:18 - There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Calvin states that these quickenings that follow mortification are accompanied by joy and subjective manifestations of God's image. Many are called, but not all have the gift of persevering in the cycle of mortification and vivification. Therefore, assurance of salvation is dubious at best.

Beside the fact that the apostle John wrote the book of 1John so that we can "know" that we are saved, Calvin's gospel contradicts a mass of holy writ. This subjective gospel also adds a peculiar twist if you consider Calvin's *power of the keys*; ie., whatever elders bind on earth will be bound in heaven. While the soteriology lends uncertainty to one's eternal destiny, is assurance found more in having the elder's approval? After all, if he states that you are saved, heaven will bind it.

Conclusion

St. Augustine was a strong advocate of allegorical interpretation for obvious reasons; the Reformed gospel cannot withstand a commonsense interpretation of Scripture. Reformed writings are often in blatant contradiction to the plain sense of Scripture.

While the apostle Paul instructed us to make it our goal to please God, and John recorded Christ's instruction to love Him by keeping His commandments, John Calvin denied that the Christian could do either. This can be found in the Calvin Institutes (3.14.9-11).

Calvin's primary argument for this supposed inability to love God through obedience is also extremely problematic. Calvin insisted that justification is defined by the Law of Moses, and a perpetual perfect keeping of the law has to be maintained in order for justification to be valid. Not only does the Bible state that justification is apart from the law, the apostle Paul stated that there is NO law than can give life. Hence, who keeps the law for us is irrelevant—the law can't give life.

Calvin sanctified this egregious error by making the perfect obedience of Christ part of the atonement. Supposedly, Christ came to die for our justification, and also came to fulfill the law through perfect obedience to maintain that justification. This leads to even more egregious error: the idea that justification isn't a finished work.

This also leads to a works salvation by the practice of antinomianism in sanctification. Because the law defines justification and mortal Christians cannot keep it perfectly, they must live out their Christian life by faith alone. If they do this, the perfect obedience of Christ will be applied to their Christian life and they will remain saved. So, Christians must live by the same gospel that saved them in order to keep themselves saved. The Reformed mantra, “We must preach the gospel to ourselves everyday” is a means, or a practice, something WE DO in order to keep ourselves saved.

Therefore, according to Calvin, Christians love Christ by applying His obedience to their lives by faith alone.

Secondly, Calvinism denies biblical love by calling on Christians to live in constant fear of the final judgment. Calvin believed that falling short of the law’s standard separates Christians from grace. As a way to motivate Christians to return to the same gospel that saved them, Calvin prescribed a focus on the final judgment and the fear of it (CI 3.3.3-9).

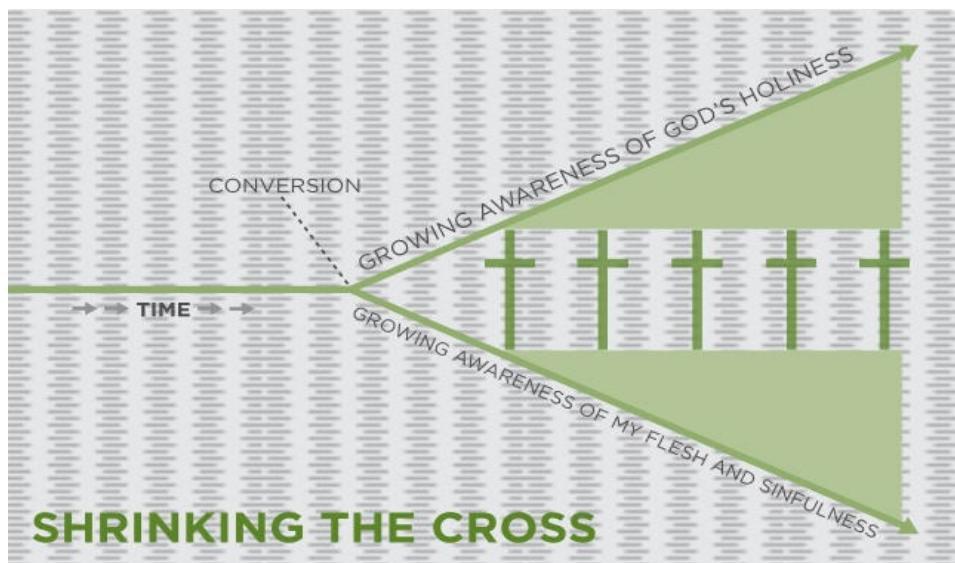
This is in direct contradiction to 1 John where the apostle states that there is no fear in love because fear has to do with judgment. This blatant contradiction to Scripture by Calvin is mindboggling.

In addition, this whole idea of calling on the same atonement that originally saved us turns the book of Hebrews completely upside down. The Hebrew writer states that those who have tasted of grace, and turn away from it, cannot be brought back to a place of repentance. Calvin prescribed a use of the law that shows this very turning away, and a need to be brought to repentance again. The Hebrew writer states the following: that’s impossible! (Hebrews 6:4-5).

Moreover, this is in direct contradiction to the Bible and its eschatology: Christians will not stand in the final judgment because that is a judgment according to the law. Christians are not under the law, and will stand in a separate judgment that will determine rewards. In fact, in direct contradiction to the apostle Paul, Calvin’s gospel is one that keeps Christians under law and a subsequent need for continued grace. That’s NOT “under grace.” *Under law* is the very definition of a lost person in the book of Romans. Christians are not *under law*...for justification, but rather *under grace*.

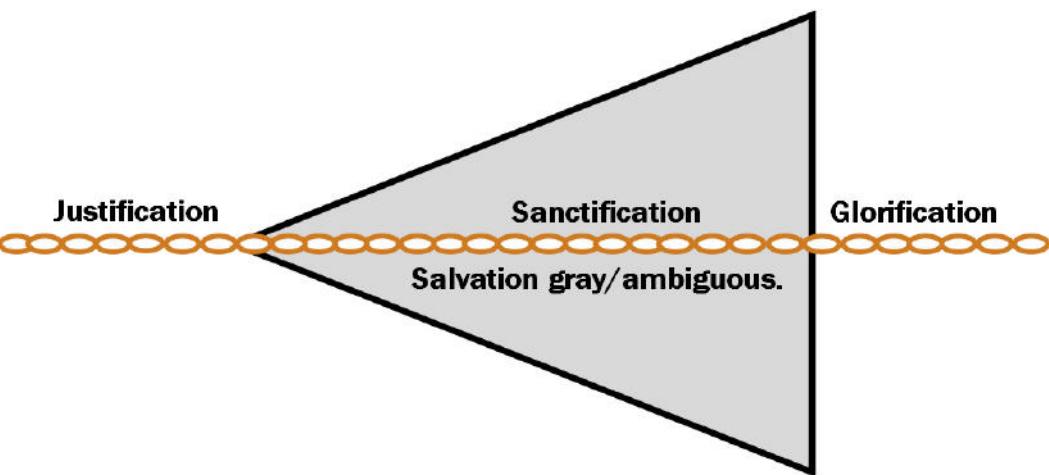
And lastly on this second point, it turns the book of James completely upside down. James stated that faith without works is dead in the same way that a body without a spirit is dead. Calvinism states that the Christian life is lived by faith alone and that all of the works are of Christ; ie., Christ supposedly loves Himself with His own works. And apparently, when Christ will say, “Well done faithful servant,” He will be supposedly talking to Himself. Of course, Calvinists would say that the “well done” refers to living a life of faith alone, but specific works are cited by Christ, not *faith alone*. If that’s what they really accomplished apart from works, why wouldn’t Christ simply say so?

Thirdly, Calvin believed that the Christian lives out their baptism through a process of “mortification and vivification.” *Mortification and vivification* is a formal part of Reformed systematic theology. It is repentance for sins that separate us from grace (mortification) resulting in the joy of our original salvation (vivification). In other words, a focus on evil leads to joy. The apostle Paul said that love does not rejoice in evil, but according to Calvinism, a focus on evil is efficacious to having joy (1Corinthians 13:6).

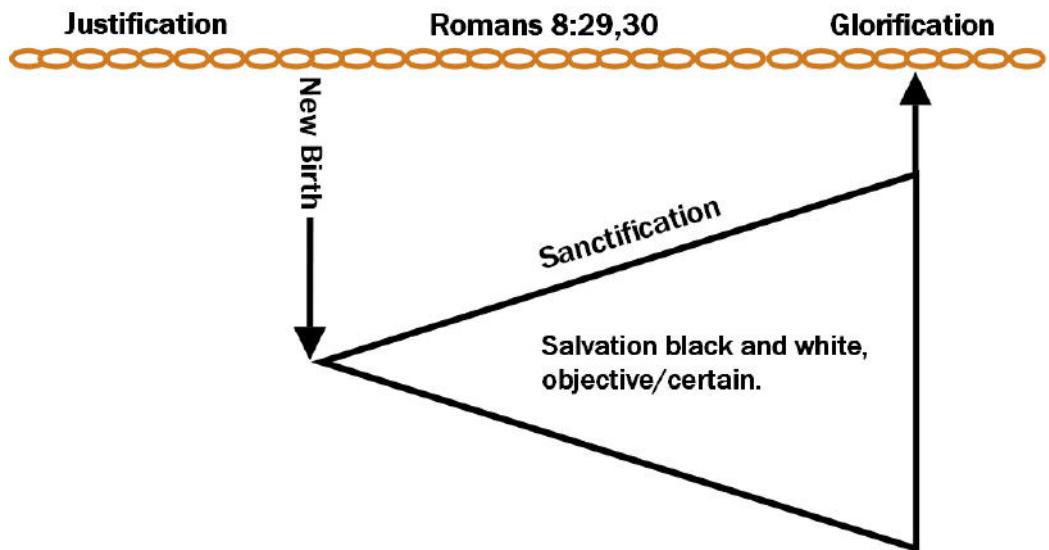


This chart illustrates how not focusing on our depravity decreases the “transforming joy” of our original salvation. It can be found on page 6 of World Harvest Mission’s doctrinal statement.

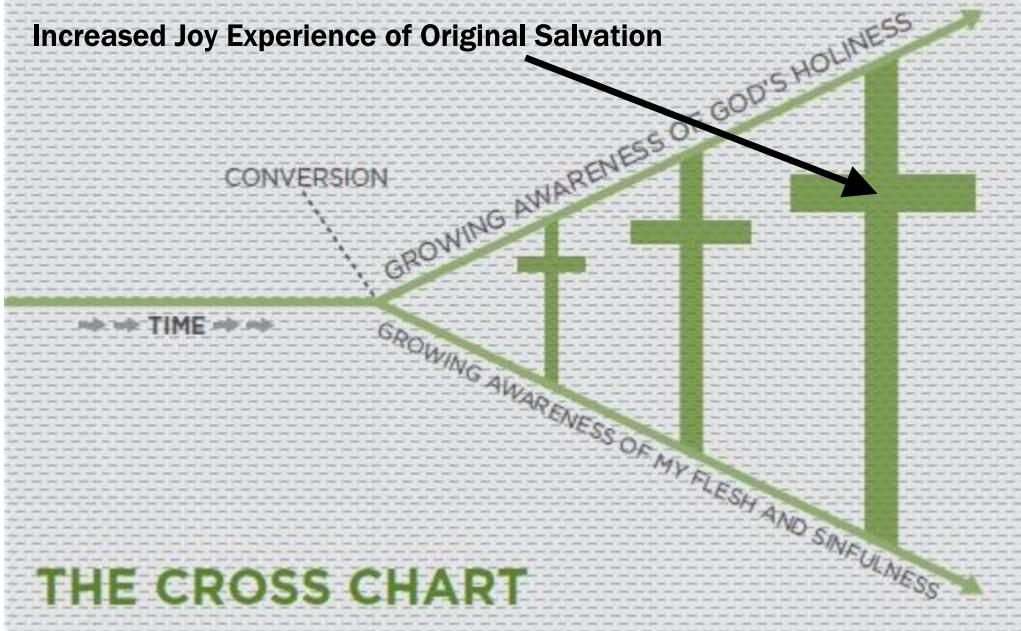
The Linear Gospel The “Golden Chain of Salvation”



The Parallel Gospel



Increased Joy Experience of Original Salvation



This popular Neo-Calvinist chart illustrates the prescribed focus on our supposed total depravity as set against God's holiness (mortification) leading to "vivification" represented by the cross getting bigger. Among many other problems with this approach, it amounts to a an anti-biblical approach to love which does not "rejoice in evil" (1Corinthians 13:6). In essence, our God-unlikeness, and increased knowledge of it, is cause for rejoicing. Hence, the paramount goal of the Christian is a greater and greater realization of our evil leading to a greater and greater gratitude for our salvation.

To show that gratitude through obedience (John 14:15) would imply an infused righteousness that is part of the Christian's true being, and theoretically, would decrease our appreciation for what Christ has done for us because we are less evil than before salvation. Supposedly, to the degree that we see our own evil, we have a greater appreciation of the cross leading to gladness. Therefore, salvation doesn't change our character, it only enables us to see our own evil in deeper ways leading to a glorification of Christ rather than ourselves.

IT'S NOT ABOUT ELECTION

The subject of Calvinism is almost always associated with the free will/election debate while John Calvin is traditionally touted as the primary apologist for the Reformation's *justification by faith alone*. Noted and respected as a pioneer against works salvation, John Calvin's position on the doctrine of election is mostly considered as a secondary issue to the gospel. Has the election/freewill debate given undue cover for Calvin's gospel?

In this booklet, author Paul Dohse argues that Calvin's gospel is just another variety of works salvation. He argues that Calvin's gospel is not good news at all, but a works salvation predicated on fear. It's not about election—the question is whether or not the gospel of Calvin can save people from eternal judgment.

Paul Dohse is a pastor and pioneer in the home fellowship movement. He has authored two books on the Reformation, and a commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans. Paul Dohse was a Reformed pastor and an advocate of the Reformed tradition for twenty years. He is the director of TTANC, a research institute which is an acronym for "The Truth About New Calvinism." TTANC has compiled seven years of research on the Neo-Calvinist movement and is a foremost authority on the movement worldwide.

Paul Dohse is the father of four sons and a daughter who is a missionary to Puerto Rico and Africa. Paul and his wife Susan live in Xenia, Ohio and have led a home fellowship there for two years.

