

Why is Calvinism a False Gospel?



Notes

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 a new creature, 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.”

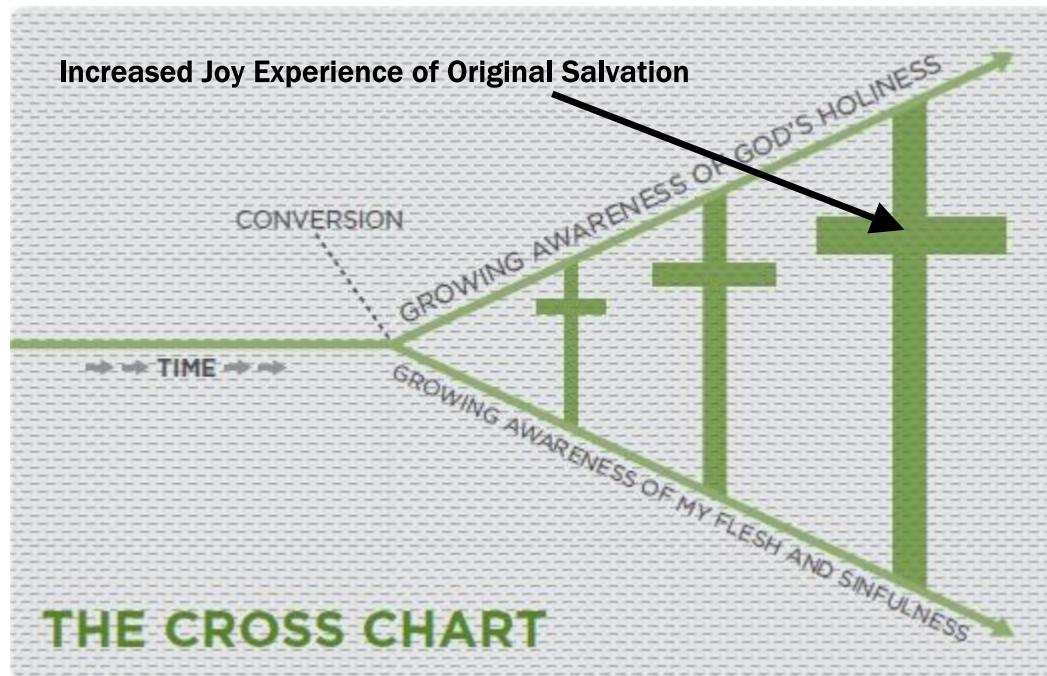
Some will say, “But I don’t agree with everything Calvin believed.” That is beside the point, Calvinism represents a false gospel. Some will also say, “The term ‘Calvinism’ represents different truth than it did originally.” Apparently, this is not the case because Calvinism still calls for a re-visitation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

Contemporary Calvinists often teach that the same gospel that saved us continues to save us IF we live by it and revisit it daily. It has always been the same teaching from the beginning for those who properly understand it.

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. 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." 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.



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.

“. . . 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).

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 the last page 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. See illustration on page 7.

“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.