A Biblical Critique of Chuck Smith's Study: "Calvinism, Arminianism & The Word Of God"

In this article we will look at the unbiblical and incorrect statements of Mr. Chuck Smith of "Calvary Chapel" fame, with respect to his study on election and predestination. His study reflects not only his own personal views but that of the leadership of most, if not all Calvary Chapel churches. The "Calvary Chapel" collection of churches represent a sort of pseudo denomination that branched out from Mr. Smith's original mega church out in Costa Mesa California. These folks are correct about many spiritual issues but they are dead wrong about their views on Calvinism as I will point out in this study.

My comments are in bold print and the text of Mr. Smith's study is in unbolded print.

Please read this study carefully and completely. It is not meant as an exercise in speed reading. You are bound to miss some important points if you do not spend QUALITY TIME digesting this material. — RM Kane

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CALVINISM, ARMINIANISM & THE WORD OF GOD

A CALVARY CHAPEL PERSPECTIVE – BY CHUCK SMITH

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. The "Five Points of Arminianism"

2. The "Five Points of Calvinism"

3. Calvary Chapel's Perspective

Introduction

What does it mean to be a part of the growing number of Calvary Chapel Fellowships? There are certain distinctions that cause us to stand out among other evangelical churches. We could point to our shared commitment to systematic Bible teaching or the emphasis upon love that transcends all cultural and ethnic barriers. Calvary Chapels have also been known for focus on worship, featuring contemporary music loyal to the Word of God and the desire of His people to praise their Lord. Without exception, Calvary Chapels have taken a strong stand for a pre-tribulational and pre-millennial view of the second coming of Jesus Christ. We have also expressed a steadfast love and support for the nation of Israel, its right to a historic homeland and its need for the Messiah. But most importantly, Calvary Chapel has been known for striking a balance between extremes on controversial theological issues that have often caused division rather than unity in the body of Christ.

Calvary Chapels have no desire to be divisive nor dogmatic in areas where Bible believers and teachers have disagreed.

Believers and teachers may disagree on what the Gospel is but church leaders still need to be dogmatic about what that Gospel is, as dogmatic as the apostle Paul and as dogmatic as the Psalmist:

Galatians 1:8 "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Psalm 119:104 "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way."

After all, there is only ONE true gospel, one narrow road:

Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"

John 14:6 "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

However, it is important to state as clearly as possible the doctrinal basis of our fellowship and unity with one another, especially in the area of pastoral leadership and teaching. While we welcome believers who disagree with us to our fellowship, we do encourage a measure of doctrinal understanding and unity among our pastors who teach us the truths of God's Word.

Calvary Chapels try to avoid conclusions, terminology, and arguments which are not clearly presented in the Bible. In no area of controversy is this approach more essential than in the long simmering debate between Calvinists and Arminians.

It is quite true that there is a great deal of controversy in this area, but that does not give a Christian the option of not proving all things, testing the spirits and studying to show oneself approved, especially in such a crucial area of doctrine…

Jude 1:3 "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

1Thes 5:21 "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

1 John 4:1 "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

2 Timothy 2:15 "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

In the midst of this heated argument it is easy to ignore or neglect the plain statements of the Bible, or to believe that we have the ability to fully understand the ways of God (Romans 11:33-36). But how tragic it is when we become more concerned with being "right" than being loving. When we discuss the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to disagree over terms such as "baptism" and "filling" and to miss the blessing and power of God's Spirit in our lives. The way we conduct our debates and express our opinions will sometimes "quench" as well as "grieve" the blessed Spirit who dwells within the believer. In the midst of our arguments over spiritual gifts, we can miss the Biblical admonition to love, which clearly is greater than all the gifts (I Corinthians 12:31 – 14:1) Our desire is to bring believers together in the love and unity of the Holy Spirit. Our focus is on our awesome God, not on ourselves. We are committed to glorifying our Lord in all we say and do.

Perhaps no issue is as important or as potentially divisive as the doctrine of salvation, reflected in the debate between followers of John Calvin (1509-1564) and those of Jacob Hermann (1560-1609), best known by the Latin form of his last name, Arminius. Since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, Christian churches and leaders have disagreed over such issues as depravity, God's sovereignty, human responsibility, election, predestination, eternal security and the nature and extent of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Disagreement on doctrine does not mean that both sides are wrong or

that no one can know for sure about certain doctrines.

Although trained in the reformed tradition, Arminius had serious doubts about the doctrine of "sovereign grace" as taught by the followers of John Calvin. He was a pastor of the Reformed congregation in Amsterdam (1588), but during his fifteen years of ministry there, he began to question any of the conclusions of Calvinism.

Lots of people question Calvinism, including believers who are under the hearing and teaching of Arminian pastors. Also, lots of people are not saved and so they view many spiritual truths as absurd…

1 Corinthians 2:14 "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

To deny the BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES that Calvin systematized is to deny the Word of God.

Most people who take the side of Arminianism, do so because they do not understand the sovereignty of God and they do not understand all the Bible has to say about man's total depravity and God's elective plan of salvation.

He left the pastorate and became professor of theology at the University of Leyden. It was his series of lectures on election and predestination that led to a violent and tragic controversy. After his death in 1609, his followers developed the Remonstrance of 1610 which outlined the "Five Points of Arminianism." This document was a protest against the doctrines of the Calvinists, and was submitted to the State of Holland. In 1618, a National Synod of the Church was convened in Dort to examine the teachings or Arminius in the light of Scripture. After 154 sessions, lasting seven months, the Five Points of Arminianism were declared to be heretical. After the synod, many of the disciples of Arminius, such as Hugo Grotius, were imprisoned or banished. When John Wesley took up some of the teachings of Arminianism, the movement began to grow, and it affected the Methodist tradition as well as the beliefs of most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

This growth in the teachings of Arminianism is not a sign of discovered truth, but rather a sign of its popularity among men, men who want a salvation plan that gives them some element of control over their eternal destiny, control that God has not granted them. The control that Arminianism grants a subscriber to that doctrine, is that you can get saved any time you want merely by accepting Christ or saying a sinner's prayer of some sort. Such a gospel is a man-made gospel, no matter how many so-called Christian churches are preaching it.

1. Arminianism

The “Five Points of Arminianism” included the following:

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1. FREE WILL

Arminius believed that the fall of man was not total, maintaining that there was enough good left in man for him to will to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation.

This free-will belief promoted by Jacobus Arminius is in conflict with scripture’s description of man’s TOTAL depravity, total inability to turn to God, the real God, on His terms:

Romans 3:11 “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”

Romans 5:6 “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Romans 10:20 “But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I WAS FOUND OF THEM THAT SOUGHT ME NOT; I WAS MADE MANIFEST UNTO THEM THAT ASKED NOT AFTER ME.”

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2. CONDITIONAL ELECTION

Arminius believed that election was based on the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe. Man’s “act of faith” was seen as the “condition” or his being elected to eternal life, since God foresaw him exercising his “free will” in response to Jesus Christ.

The problem with this idea is that God FOREKNEW WHOM HE HAD ELECTED TO SAVE – HENCE THOSE WHOM CHRIST CAME TO DIE FOR, not those whom God foreknew would choose Christ. AS YOU CAN SEE, IF WE DON’T UNDERSTAND THE SCOPE OF CHRIST’S ATONEMENT THEN WE WON’T SEE PROBLEMS WITH THE FREE-WILL VIEW REGARDING GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE. Christ could not have possibly have died for EVERY SINGLE HUMAN BEING who ever lived or will live, because judicially, God cannot be a JUST God and punish the guilty in Hell if He has already punished His Son at Calvary for those same sinners and their sins!

Many Christians are told that God has looked into the future to see who would accept Christ and therefore those people are the ones whom God has predestined to be saved. Where is this idea stated in the Bible? This idea is a false doctrine, perhaps based on a misunderstanding of scriptures like Romans 8:29 and Romans 11:2. After the fall of Adam, if God ever looked forward in time, the only thing He saw was this:

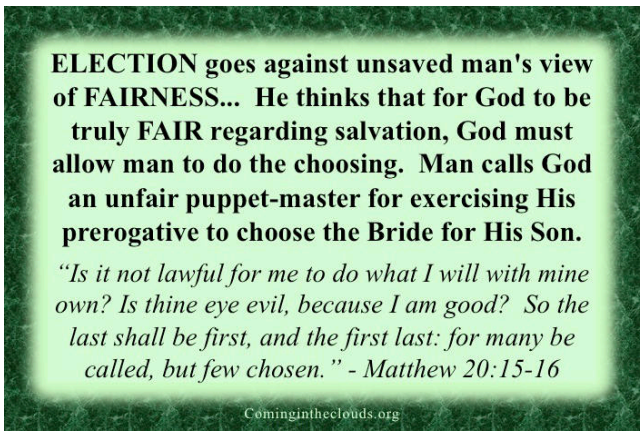
Genesis 6:5 "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

If we look at Romans 8:29 and Romans 11:2 in context, we will see PLENTY of evidence for election by God's sovereign grace and ZERO evidence for that election being based on God looking into the future and seeing people accepting Christ:

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are THE CALLED according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's ? It is God that justifieth."

God FOREKNEW that there were NONE that seeketh after God (Romans 3:11)

The fact that God FOREKNEW that there were NONE that seeketh after God (Romans 3:11), He had no choice but to call people out of the world if He was going to have a people for Himself. God does the electing. Sinners do no elect themselves to be saved. God has the right, and HIM ALONE, to choose the BRIDE for HIS SON whom He will be presenting to the Lord Jesus Christ at the wedding in heaven!



To DENY ELECTION is to DENY that GOD has the RIGHT TO CHOOSE THE BRIDE FOR HIS SON!

Romans 11:2 "God hath not cast away <u>his</u> which he foreknew. Wot [know] ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. 5 Even so then at this present time also <u>there is a remnant according to the ELECTION of grace</u>. 6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. 7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded 8 (According as it is written, <u>GOD hath given them the spirit of slumber</u>, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day."

Note in verse 5 above, that election is according to grace, NOT according to foreknowledge

If it was according to God's foreknowledge of our acceptance of Christ, it would be according to works and not according to grace. Note also in verse 7 that God blinded the rest. He did not intend for the rest to be saved, only His elect. Does that sound unfair? Remember, "who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?" (1 Cor. 2:16) and also "The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." (Prov. 16:4). Also, if God were to be fair, everyone would end up in hell.

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3. UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT

“Arminius held that redemption was based on the fact that God loves everybody,” — *Chuck Smith*

This idea is very popular today and I was taught it and once believed it but it happens to be unbiblical. God loves His people but hates the workers of iniquity:

Psalm 5:5 “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. 6 Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.”

“that Christ died for everyone,” — *Chuck Smith*

If God is just (and He surely is) and if Christ died for everyone, then no one would go to hell. Yet scripture is full of warnings about hell, including warnings directly from Christ when He walked the earth two thousand years ago…

Matthew 5:29 “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Matthew 5:30 “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Matthew 10:28 “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

“and that the Father is not willing that any should perish.” — *Chuck Smith*

This scripture verse cannot have the “obvious” meaning since God is capable of saving whomever He wishes. So if He truly desired that not one solitary soul would perish, then no one would have to be concerned about hell. Yet we know from scripture that hell is very real and it will be quite full of sinners, not because God failed to save people but because those people were not among God’s elect.

“The death of Christ provided the grounds for God to save all men,” — *Chuck Smith*

Christ paid a specific ransom for specific sins of specific sinners. His

suffering and death was not ambiguous. It was as specific as the various animal sacrifices outlined in the Old Testament.

"but each must exercise his own "free will" in order to be saved." — *Chuck Smith*

This idea makes man his own saviour (at least in part) and it attributes abilities to man that man does not possess… the capability and the desire to come to Christ while he is still an ungodly, unregenerated, spiritually dead sinner.

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4. OBSTRUCTABLE GRACE

"Arminius believed that since God wanted all men to be saved, He sent the Holy Spirit to "woo" all men to Christ, but since man has absolute "free will," he is able to resist God's will for his life." — *Chuck Smith*

This idea that man can resist God's will is in violation of scripture…

Romans 9:19 "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? FOR WHO HATH RESISTED HIS WILL?"

John 1:13 "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

"He believed that God's will to save all men can be frustrated by the finite will of man." — *Chuck Smith*

Apparently the god of Arminius was not the God of Daniel:

Daniel 4:35 "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

"He also taught that man exercises his own will first, and then is born again." — *Chuck Smith*

Arminius taught contrary to scripture, which says God gives the sinner the new heart first, and then the sinner is born again (able and willing to walk in God's statutes)…

Ezekiel 36:25 "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

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5. FALLING FROM GRACE

"If man cannot be saved by God unless it is man's will to be saved, then man cannot continue in salvation unless he continues to will to be saved." — *Chuck Smith*

This sounds like Salvation On The Maintenance Plan

Again, we make man his own saviour with this idea of "salvation on the maintenance plan" and we deny scripture. The salvation of a true believer is the work of God through and through. God does the saving and God ensures that none of His sheep perish… they can't possibly perish since their sins have already been completely paid for by Christ at Calvary. Christ cannot UNSUFFER what He already suffered for His elect!!! To think so is preposterous!!! LUDICROUS!!!! Yet that is what would have to happen in order for Arminius (or anyone) to be right about a saved person losing their salvation.

Jude 1:24 "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"

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2. Calvinism

Interestingly, John Calvin, the French reformer, did not formulate what today we know as the Five Points of Calvinism. This came out of the Canons of the

Council of Dort (1618), and subsequent statements among the many Reformed Confessions have expanded upon these matters. Calvinism has been known for outstanding scholars, theologians, preachers, and reformers, men such as John Owen, George Whitefield, William Wilberforce, Abraham Kuyper, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

"Those in the reformed tradition who answered the teachings of Arminius chose the word "TULIP" as an acrostic to summarize their answer to the Five Points of Arminianism" — *Chuck Smith*

Chuck Smith is correct in saying that Calvin did not formulate the five points of Calvinism. What Smith failed to mention is that the Council of Dort was convened TO ADDRESS THE HERESIES OF JACOBUS ARMINIUS, the very doctrines that Smith is defending in this article of his on Calvinism!

"1. "T" = TOTAL DEPRAVITY – The Calvinists believed that man is in absolute bondage to sin and Satan, unable to exercise his own will to trust in Jesus Christ without the help of God." — *Chuck Smith*

The Bible teaches this (ie. the doctrine known as TOTAL DEPRAVITY)…

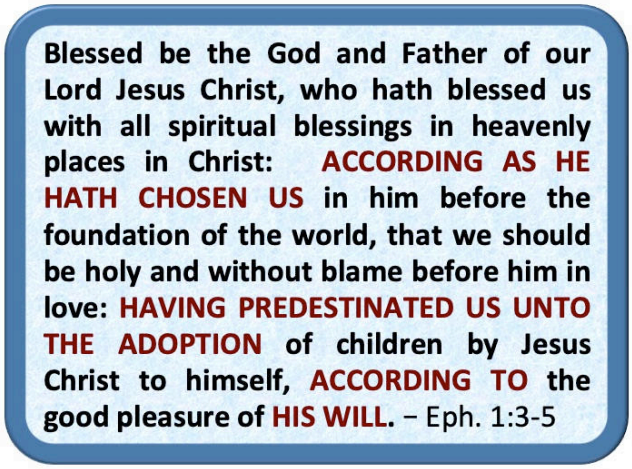
Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

Romans 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

This is why man needs a saviour, one who does it all.

"2. "U" = UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION – The Calvinists believed that foreknowledge is based upon the plan and purpose of God, and that election is not based upon the decision of man, but the "free will" of the Creator alone." — *Chuck Smith*



The Bible teaches this (unconditional election)…

Ephesians 1:4 "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having PREDESTINATED US unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, <