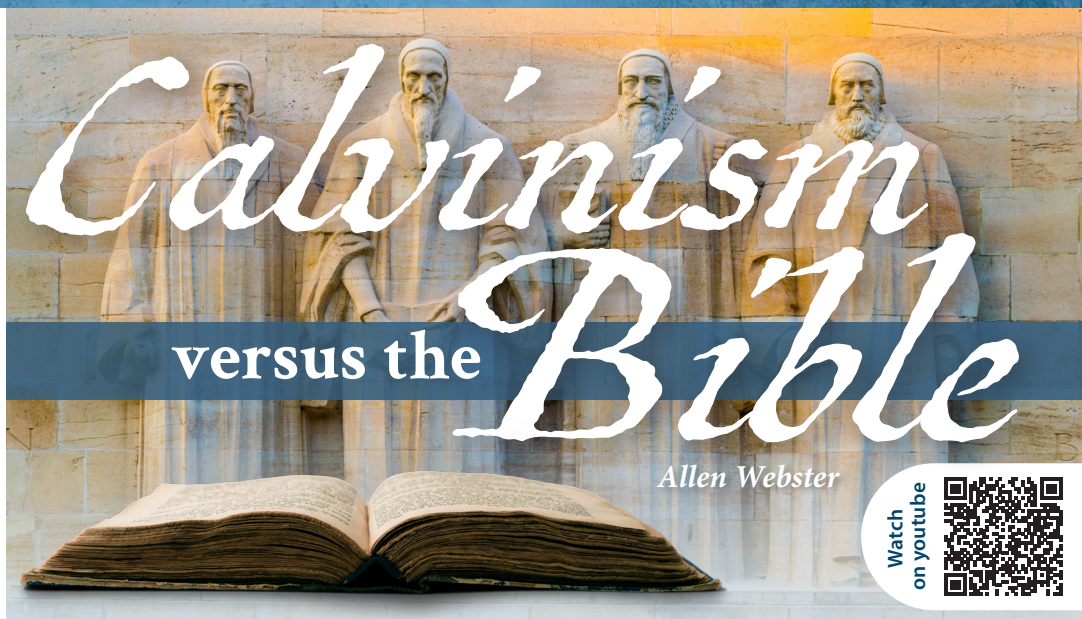
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Calvinism versus the Bible

Allen Webster

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One of the great dangers Christians face is the subtle infiltration of human doctrines that distort the Word of God (Matthew 7:15; 15:7–9). Such doctrines often appeal to convenience and human intellect (man's wisdom, 1 Corinthians 1:18–25) rather than a simple, honest understanding of Scripture. Calvinism, a theological system developed from the teachings of John Calvin (1509–1564), presents one such challenge. At its core is the famous acronym TULIP, which summarizes its five main tenets. Though well-packaged, each point of TULIP deviates from Bible teaching when compared with the whole of God's Word. Let us carefully compare each Calvinist doctrine with the inspired Scriptures.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY (T)

Calvinist Position:[1] This doctrine asserts that, as a consequence of man's fall in Eden, every part of human nature is corrupted, rendering an individual incapable of choosing God without divine intervention. Man is so utterly depraved due to inheriting sin that he is incapable of responding to God's offer of salvation. Man cannot seek God, believe in Christ, or choose to obey the gospel unless God first regenerates him. This leads to the conclusion that man has no free will in spiritual matters.

Biblical Response: While the Bible does teach that all men sin (Romans 3:23), it does not teach that infants inherit sin from their parents (cf. Ezekiel 18:18–20; Matthew 18:3; Hebrews 12:7–9; James 4:17). Scripture emphasizes that man is accountable for his choices; God invites all people to come to Him; and humans have the ability to respond to God.

1. **Man Has a Choice:** "If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).
2. **Man Can Seek God:** "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).
3. **Faith Comes from Hearing:** "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

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The Bible nowhere teaches that man must be regenerated before believing. Instead, God gives man the ability to respond to the gospel through free will (John 1:12). Jesus calls all people to come to Him (Matthew 11:28; cf. Revelation 22:17), which would be a hollow invitation if people were incapable of responding.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION (U)

Calvinist Position: This doctrine teaches that, before the foundation of the world, God chose certain individuals to be saved and others to be lost, and that this choice had nothing to do with human response or action. Calvinists claim that salvation is entirely dependent on God's arbitrary election.

Biblical Response: The Bible teaches that God desires all men to be saved, and that election is conditional upon obedient faith.

1. **God Wants All to Be Saved:** God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).
2. **God Is Impartial:** "God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34–35).
3. **Election through Faithful Intent:** "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

God's election is not arbitrary, although the Bible does speak of God's foreknowledge (Romans 8:29). He chooses to save those who believe in Christ (John 3:16) and obey Christ's gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8), not according to His pre-selection. God's election process is often explained in this way: God voted for us; Satan voted against us; we cast the deciding vote.

LIMITED ATONEMENT (L)

Calvinist Position: Calvinists argue that Christ's atoning sacrifice was intended only for the elect. In other words, Jesus did not die for the sins of the entire world, but only for those whom God had chosen for salvation. (This is also known as "definite atonement.")

Biblical Response: The Bible teaches that Jesus died for all people, offering salvation to everyone.

1. **Jesus Died for the Whole World:** "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2).
2. **God Loves All People:** "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
3. **Salvation Offered to All:** "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

The idea of limited atonement contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for all but effective only for those who respond to His offer (Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 19:22). To claim otherwise undermines the universal nature of God's love.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE (I)

Calvinist Position: Calvinism asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom He has determined to save, overcoming their resistance to the call of the gospel. Thus, God's grace is irresistible. Once God determines to save an individual, that person's response is inevitable.

Biblical Response: The Bible repeatedly shows that man can resist God's grace and reject His will.

1. **God's Grace Can Be Resisted:** "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you" (Acts 7:51).
2. **People Reject Christ's Invitation:** "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).
3. **Free Will to Respond:** "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

God extends His grace to all, but He does not force anyone to accept it. The call to salvation is universal; God's children are the bearers of God's good news (Mark 16:15); and individuals have the responsibility to accept or reject it (Mark 16:16).

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS (P)

Calvinist Position: Calvinism teaches that those whom God has elected and drawn to Himself will persevere in faith until the end. That is, the elect can never fall away from grace. It is impossible for a truly saved person to lose his salvation.

Biblical Response: While the Bible offers assurance to the faithful, it also warns Christians about the possibility of falling away.

1. **Christians Can Fall:** "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4; cf. 2 Peter 2:20–22).
2. **Endurance Is Required:** "You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:36).

3. **Warnings against Apostasy:** "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12; cf. Galatians 1:6–9).

The doctrine of perseverance ignores the Bible's warnings about falling away. God promises to keep us secure (John 10:28–29), but Christians maintain personal freedom to leave Christianity and go back to sin if they want (2 Timothy 4:10). God no more forces them to stay than He forces them to come (Revelation 2:10; 3:20).

CONCLUSION

Each point of Calvinism's TULIP fails to align with the clear teaching of Scripture. While Calvinism seeks to exalt God's sovereignty, it does so at the expense of man's free will and responsibility. The Bible presents a sovereign God who desires His creatures to respond to Him out of love, not coercion. He loves all (John 3:16), wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and invites all to respond to the gospel (Matthew 11:28). Let us cling to God's Word (John 17:17), for therein is the only path to God's house (John 14:6).

Endnotes

[1] Neo-Calvinism, or Reform Theology, is a modern take on TULIP.





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by Kerry Duke

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This first part of the study deals with the long-asked question of whether or not the sin committed by Adam applies to all of us.

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How do Calvinists see free will? How does the concept of free will affect our lives?

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A closer look at the Calvinistic belief of predestination. Is everything we do and where we are going already determined?

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Sinner's Repentance: Luke 13:3
Sinner's Confession: Romans 10:10
Sinner's Baptism: Acts 22:16
Christian's Love: Matthew 22:37
Christian's Work: James 2:24
Christian's Hope: Romans 8:24
Christian's Endurance: Revelation 2:10



Calvinism and the Great Commission

John Calvin was a religious reformer and theologian. The basic premise of his theology was the absolute sovereignty (right to reign) of God, out of which evolved his misguided theory of predestination. The French reformer believed that human free will was destroyed by man's "original sin;" thus, the innate power to yield to the will of God was lost forever.

Nonetheless, Calvin contended that God, by virtue of His sovereign will, predetermined to save some, whom he called the "elect," but condemn others—the "non-elect." In his famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the reformer wrote: "No one who wishes to be thought religious dares outright to deny predestination, by which God chooses some for the hope of life, and condemns others to eternal death."[1]

Later this ideology was incorporated into the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643). Note the following (Article III): "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. . . . By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death."[2]

There are many modern advocates of Calvinism. One, James Montgomery Boice, in one of his books, relates an incident in the life of John Gerstner, a professor at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. One of Gerstner's students was R. C. Sproul.

Gerstner had been lecturing on predestination. He asked his students: "If predestination is true, why should we be involved in evangelism?" One by one the students replied: "I do not know;" "It beats me;" "I have always wondered about that."

Finally the professor came to Sproul. After fumbling for words, young Sproul finally answered. Appealing to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), he said: "One small point I think we ought to notice here is that God does command us to be involved in evangelism." Gerstner laughed and conceded that this was the correct response.[3]

That quip was construed to solve the problem of predestination, but it does not even come close. The Calvinist theory goes something like this: Humanity, by virtue of its fall in Adam's "original sin," lost its ability to make spiritual choices. Accordingly, when one is exposed to the gospel, no matter how sincere he might be, in his depraved condition he cannot believe it—however hard he may want to, or try.

The sinner is helpless to believe, unless God, by means of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, opens his heart and empowers him with the "grace" to believe. Upon whom does God decide to pour out this life-changing power? Only those whom He "elected" before the foundation of the world.

These fundamental premises of Calvinism bring us back to the primary question. If a person's salvation was decreed before the foundation of the world, and there is nothing that can be done to alter that, what is the purpose of preaching the gospel to the whole creation when (a) it would be impossible for the whole creation to believe; and (b) the fate of all people already has been set?

The fundamental premises of Calvinism may be summed up in this well-known saying of a bygone era:

Everyone's salvation or condemnation was determined before time began.
Therefore, if one seeks redemption, he cannot find it.
If he finds it, he cannot obtain it.
If he obtains it, he cannot lose it!

Such is a maze of incomprehensible confusion. It does not take an Aristotle to conclude that this theological system is beyond the sphere of both inspired Scripture and common sense.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16) contains:

- facts to be believed;
- commands to be obeyed;
- promises to be embraced; and
- a potential destiny to be avoided.

The truth is, the doctrine of Calvinistic predestination makes void every command of God, offers no hope to the obedient, and nullifies every warning of eternal punishment.

It leaves those who know they are lost with a sense of hopelessness. It provides no confidence of salvation—for one would have no way of knowing whether he is saved or lost. It leaves those who believe they are saved with a false sense of security, laboring under the illusion they never can be lost, no matter what they do.

It is thoroughly false and must be renounced by conscientious Bible students.

—Wayne Jackson, www.Christiancourier.com

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Endnotes

[1] Quoted in Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 302.

[2] Quoted in Bettenson, *Documents*, 347.

[3] R. C. Sproul, "Prayer and God's Sovereignty," in *Our Sovereign God*, ed. James M. Boice (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 127–28.

Is There *Free Will?*



Free will has been in the news recently with a neuroscientist, Robert Sapolsky, having published a book arguing that there is no free will. Let me set aside the scientific question for a moment and turn to the Bible because there is a religious argument about free will. I once had a Calvinist professor sum up the debate as follows: "People who believe in free will say the Calvinist God is a tyrant, and the Calvinists say the God of free will is impotent." While I understand that Calvinists want to protect God's sovereignty against the implications of human free will (i.e., we can do things God does not want us to do), that summary is lacking. Let us look at some Bible verses that do not usually come up in the debate on free will:

Commands. God gives many commands throughout the Old and New Testaments, but what does a command imply? If I were to command a person to bench press 10,000 pounds, am I reasonable? If the Calvinist God commands a person, "Do not murder," but that person has no option or ability to murder, would not the command be unreasonable? The God of the Bible is not unreasonable: "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).

Choose. Most of the time, when the Bible speaks of choices, it speaks of God's choices. That makes sense because of God's sovereignty—His choices are certainly stronger than ours. However, there are several places where people are called upon to choose one thing over another. For instance, in response to David's sin regarding a census, God specifically gives David three options for punishment (2 Samuel 24:12). If David had no free will, then he had no choice, which would make God a liar for telling him he did.

For whom did Christ die? We are told that Christ died "once for all" (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27). If there is no free will, why would Christ have to die for all? Could not He just die for the sins that were going to be forgiven? But that just brings up a related question: Whom does God want to save? We are told twice (1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9) that God wants everyone to be saved. But not everyone will be saved (Matthew 7:13–14). The God of free will made a sacrifice potent enough to cleanse every person that ever was, is, or will be of every sin they ever committed, but He leaves to us the option of accepting it or rejecting it. The Calvinist God is either a liar again, telling people He wants to save them when He does not, or perhaps He is just not powerful enough to save everyone, making Him impotent.

The God of the Bible, who gives free will, is both powerful and loving. He allows man to stand against Him, but He is too strong to be thwarted by any number of men. He made the sacrifice to save you so that you can choose to stand with Him. If you have exercised your free will to reject God, consider using it in your own best interest and accept God. —Andy Wright

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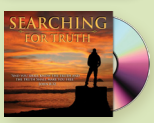
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Calvinism Versus the Bible

Find answers in Ezekiel 18:20; Luke 13:34; Acts 7:51; Acts 10:34–35; Galatians 5:4; 1 Timothy 2:4; Titus 2:11; James 4:17; 2 Peter 2:20; 1 John 2:2. *Questions are taken from the New King James Version.*

(T) Total Depravity

1. "The soul _____ shall die. The son shall not _____ of the father, nor the father _____ _____. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon _____, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon _____."
2. "Therefore, to him who _____ _____ and _____ _____ to him it is sin."

(U) Unconditional Election

3. God . . . "who _____ _____ to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
4. "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows _____. But in every nation _____ fears Him and works righteousness is _____ by Him.' "

(L) Limited Atonement

5. "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for _____ but also for _____."
6. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to _____."

(I) Irresistible Grace

7. "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always _____ _____; as your fathers did, so do you."
8. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often _____ gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but ___ _____!"

(P) Perseverance of the Saints

9. "You have become _____ _____, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have _____ _____.
10. "For if, _____ _____ the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are _____ in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning."

Once Saved, Always Saved?

Eternal security, also known as "once saved, always saved," is the belief that from the moment one becomes a Christian, he can never lose his salvation. Every book of the New Testament refutes this teaching. The Bible teaches that a person can

1. Be denied by Jesus (Matthew 10:33).
2. Make the Word of no effect (Mark 7:7).
3. Fall away (Luke 8:13).
4. Leave God's love (John 15:9–10).
5. Perish (Acts 8:20).
6. Cause a brother to fall (Romans 14:13).
7. Become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).
8. Leave the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).
9. Fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).
10. Be deceived by false teachers (Ephesians 4:14).
11. Become enemies of Christ (Philippians 3:18).
12. Move away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23).
13. Die from not standing fast in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:8).
14. Be deceived and damned (2 Thessalonians 2:3–12).
15. Put away the faith and be delivered to Satan (1 Timothy 1:19–20).
16. Err concerning the truth and be overthrown (2 Timothy 2:18).
17. Turn from the truth and deny God (Titus 1:14–16).
18. Have ineffective faith by failing to acknowledge Christ (Philemon 1:6).
19. Draw back to perdition (Hebrews 10:38–39).
20. Fall into judgment (James 5:12).
21. Be devoured by Satan (1 Peter 5:8).
22. Be led away by error and fall (2 Peter 3:17).
23. Disobey and not have the truth (1 John 2:4–5).
24. Lose his reward (2 John 1:8).
25. Follow that which is evil and not be of God (3 John 1:11).
26. Be destroyed (Jude 1:5).
27. Be blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 3:5; 22:19).

Let us strive to take heed lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12), fight the good fight, and finish our race (2 Timothy 4:7), for the Lord has promised a crown of life to His faithful children (Revelation 2:10).

—Zack Williams, Nashville, Arkansas

"Take heed lest [you] fall."

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12

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Recommended **Resource**



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CALVINISM Versus the BIBLE

The acronym TULIP outlines the five core tenets of Calvinism, a theological system derived from the teachings of John Calvin and approved in the Synod of Dort (1618–1619). These principles form the foundation of Reformed theology.

TENENT OF CALVINISM	BIBLICAL TEACHING
T TOTAL DEPRAVITY This doctrine asserts that, due to the fall of mankind, every part of human nature is corrupted by sin, rendering humans incapable of coming to God or doing good on their own.	Acts 17:27 teaches that God wants everyone to seek Him. Matthew 7:7–8 teaches that it is our responsibility and within our ability.
U UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION God's choice of certain individuals for salvation is based entirely on His sovereign will, not on any foreseen merit or action on the part of the individual. Election is an act of grace, entirely independent of human effort or decision.	John 3:16 teaches that God's plan of salvation is open to all, and Acts 17:30 indicates that God wants everyone everywhere to repent. God commands everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3–4).
L LIMITED ATONEMENT Christ's atonement was specifically intended for the elect. While Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all, it is effective only for those whom God has chosen to save.	As 1 John 2:2 explicitly states, Christ's atonement extends beyond believers to the entire world, and 2 Peter 3:9 shows that God does not want anyone to perish. Romans 5:18 teaches that Jesus' one act of righteousness makes justification for all mankind possible.
I IRRESISTIBLE GRACE When God extends His grace to the elect, they cannot resist it. God's call ensures that those He chooses will come to salvation.	Matthew 23:37 shows that God's call can be rejected. Revelation 3:20 shows that God invites, but individuals must choose to respond. John 5:40 shows that individuals can refuse to respond.
P PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS Often summarized as "once saved, always saved," this doctrine teaches that those whom God has regenerated and justified will persevere in faith until the end. Their salvation is secure, as it depends on God's power and not on their efforts.	Every book of the Bible after the church is established in Acts 2 warns Christians against falling away. Hebrews 6:4–6 indicates that, once saved, an individual can fall away. Matthew 24:13, John 15:6, and Revelation 2:10 all indicate that one must endure to the end or risk being cut off. In 1 Timothy 1:19–20 and 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul calls out specific individuals who have rejected the faith. In the case of Demas, Colossians 4:14 shows that he was faithful at one time.



Total Hereditary Deparavity

One creed states that all persons are born "positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse."[1]

So God, the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:7–9), through human procreation, brings a baby into this world with a corrupted nature, which leads him to sin, without choice, and then God punishes him for sinning, which he could not avoid. Does this seem like what a fair and loving God would do?

Are babies born of the devil? One Calvanist states: "That man is totally depraved is evident from his being a child of the devil—fathered by the devil, of the same moral nature and, without salvation, destined to the same hell to which the devil is destined."[2] It is difficult to understand how any father or mother could believe this.

God declares, "All souls are Mine" (Ezekiel 18:4)—not Satan's. What about Psalm 51:5? "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." David spoke of his mother's condition. He did not say that he was born with a sinful nature. "In iniquity" means that he was born into a world of iniquity.

In the day of Judgment, every person will be judged according to his own works—not the deeds of Adam nor the deeds of his parents (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Christians become like little children when their sins are forgiven (Matthew 18:3), which shows that children are not born in sin. Rejoice at such good news!

Endnotes

[1] J. M. Pendleton, *Church Manual* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1912), 46.
[2] W. A. Jarrell, *The Gospel in Water* (St. Louis: National Baptist Publishing Co., 1886), 251–52.

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A Disconnect at Church?

Right now, all over the world, people are reading their Bibles. For some of us, this can be discouraging because the teachings we hear at church services, from those we love and trust, do not always align with what we are discovering in Scripture. This can lead to confusion, frustration, and sometimes even a sense of disconnection.

If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. Many have experienced this struggle. Here is the good news: If you feel disconnected, maybe it is because you have not yet found a church that aligns with the Bible. That church does exist!

This issue of *House to House* is meant to be a source of encouragement and support for you. The truths you are discovering as you read the Bible are valid. The Bible is right. If you have felt distant from a church because you struggle with certain teachings, like Calvinism or Reformed Theology, we encourage you not to settle for teaching that does not align with what Scripture says. Our prayer is that this issue helps you find some clarity and the answers you seek.

If this issue does not directly apply to you, we still want you to know why we are sharing it. Our desire is to support those who study the Bible on their own and feel like they are not hearing truth in their churches. We want to help people connect with a community of believers who share that same commitment to God's Word. We are not sharing this to boast about being right, but to encourage all of us to seek truth together, based on the simple, clear teachings of the Bible.

Please, open this issue and your Bible, and study with us. —Matt Wallin

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