

In *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley*, I present various theological views, some which I considered biblically correct, others misguided or plain wrong. Lest there be any confusion as to where I stand on the doctrines of salvation, I offer the following summary of my beliefs.

James G. McCarthy
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This I Believe

God created Adam and Eve that they and their descendants might worship Him as their Creator and enjoy His fellowship forever. That this might be a genuine and meaningful relationship, God gave them volition, the ability to make independent autonomous moral decisions. They used this freedom to disobey God. Sin entered the world and spread to all mankind (Genesis 3:1-7; Romans 5:12). With sin came condemnation and death (Romans 5:12-21). Humankind became corrupt, under the judgment of God, and “by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3).

In mercy and love, God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save sinners from eternal destruction (John 3:16). He was born of a virgin, whose name was Mary. She came to be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34-35). In this way Jesus, the eternal Son of God, “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). He is, therefore, true God and true man, though without personal sin (John 1:1-14; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).

Jesus died for sinners, taking the penalty that was justly theirs (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18), and arose on the third day, never to die again (Romans 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). His death was for all mankind. Speaking of Jesus, John writes, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Jesus’ death fully satisfied the righteous demands of God against sinners (Romans 3:24-25; 1 Peter 1:18-19; John 19:30; Hebrews 10:18). At the cross, God the Father charged His beloved Son with the sins of the world. He did this that He might justly forgive sinners and attribute to them the very righteousness of God (Isaiah 53:4-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). This crediting of the righteousness of God to the account of the believer is called *justification*. It is accomplished by the declaration of God. He pronounces a sinner to be in a right state before Him. “God is the one who justifies” (Romans 8:33). He justifies the ungodly sinner who believes in Jesus (Romans 4:5).

The imputed righteousness of God is available “through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed

publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Romans 3:22-25). It is available to every person. This is the express will of God. Jesus invited all to receive salvation through Him, saying, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Sinners come to Christ through repentance and faith. Repentance is an inward response to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:4-5; John 16:8-11). It is a change of mind about God, sin, and self. The sinner begins to fear God (Proverbs 1:7; Acts 10:1-35). He acknowledges God’s rightful authority over his life and his guilt before God because of sin.

Saving faith is trusting Jesus for salvation. It is more than simply repeating a prayer or giving mental ascent to a creed. Saving faith is placing one’s full trust in Christ as Savior. The Scriptures are the basis of this faith. They communicate to us the promises of God concerning salvation. Jesus is the object of this faith. A sinner must trust Him for salvation. What one must believe about Jesus is the gospel: “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Repentance precedes faith and is prerequisite to it. The Bible says, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, / But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (Proverbs 28:13). The Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). Speaking of the Father, Jesus promised, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17). To be *willing to do God’s will* is repentance. To know whether Jesus’ teaching is of God or Himself, is to have the faith to believe the gospel.

God gives those who repent the light to understand and believe the gospel. We see this in the example of the disciples of John the Baptist. John “came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him” (John 1:7). Many received his message, repented, and confessing their sins were baptized by him. Later when they met Jesus, witnessing His teaching and works, they readily believed in Him. This was true of the men who later became the closest disciples of Christ (John 1:35-51; Acts 1:21-23). It was true of the multitudes who received John’s Baptism (Luke 7:29). The converse was also true. Those who rejected John’s call to repentance, later rejected Jesus’ call to faith (Luke 7:30; John 10:24-29). The same is also true today. When a sinner repents, the Father gives that individual the light to understand the gospel. When this occurs, the person readily trusts in Jesus and is saved. Jesus taught, “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (John 6:45). When a person refuses to repent, he cannot believe and be saved. In the words of Jesus: “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44).

Though God grants the ability to believe to those who repent, He has already granted the ability to repent to all men. Acts 5:31 teaches that God has granted repentance to the Jews that they might be saved. Acts 11:18 teaches that God has “granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

This means that anyone, Jew or Gentile, can repent. The Scriptures are explicit. The Lord is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Christ instructed His disciples “that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). It is what He preached, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). It is also what Paul preached: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 20:20-21).

That sinners might repent and believe the gospel, God continues to take the initiative, reaching out to them. He does this by revealing Himself through His glorious creation, generous provision, and manifold kindnesses (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20; Acts 14:16-17; Romans 2:4). He has made Himself known in a special way through the Scriptures (Romans 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:15-17) and most perfectly in the Lord Jesus (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-3). That sinners might repent, God has also sent forth the Holy Spirit to “convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). Without this help from God, no man by his own initiative would seek God or be saved (Romans 3:10-18).

Sadly, despite all that God has done for sinners, most will not turn from their sins that they might be saved (John 3:19; Revelation 22:17). Jesus told the ruling Jews who were opposing Him, “You are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5:40).

Those who do repent and believe in Jesus at that moment are “born again” (1 Peter 1:23). They are regenerated (Titus 3:5), made new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17), “children of God” (John 1:12), “redeemed” (1 Peter 1:18), and “forgiven” (1 John 2:12). Thereafter, God sees them as “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:1-14; 1 John 5:20). Sealed with the Holy Spirit, they cannot lose their salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14). They are eternally secure in Christ, kept by God for heaven (John 10:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Jude 1:24-25). Justified by God, no one can bring a charge against them and nothing can separate them from the love of Christ (Romans 8:33-39)

Through the promises of God in Scripture, those who are justified can know that they are in Christ and secure in Him. John proclaims, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). This assurance deepens as a believer grows in his understanding of the significance of Jesus’ finished work on the cross and as the believer observes the confirming evidences of salvation in his life. These evidences include freedom from the tyranny of sin, a new sensitivity to sin, a desire to please God, the ability to understand God’s Word, and the inward assurance of the Holy Spirit that the person is a child of God (Romans 6:1-23; 8:15-17; 1 John 2:27). The outward evidences of new birth are obedience to Christ and the fruit of the Holy Spirit (John 14:21; Galatians 5:16-23; 1 John 3:4-10; James 2:14-26). One of the first responsibilities for the new believer is to publicly confess Christ in baptism (Matthew 28:19; Acts 16:31-33).

According to the Bible, predestination refers to two things. The first is that God predetermined the plan of salvation. He would give His beloved Son to die for sinners (Acts 2:23; 4:28; 1 Corinthians 2:7). The second is that God predetermined specific blessings for the redeemed. These include the privileges of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29-30), being adopted as sons (Ephesians 1:5), and obtaining an inheritance with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 1:11). The Bible does not teach that God predestined certain individuals to salvation itself.

According to the Bible, election refers to the Father's choice of those whom He knew in His Son. This election occurred in the omniscience of God "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). It took place "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:4), not apart from Christ or that certain individuals might be placed into Christ. The Father chose them that they might be "holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). Sinners come to the Son through repentance and faith (Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 20:21). They come to the Father through the Son (1 Timothy 2:5).