

Church History - Orthodox Churches; Calvinism After Calvin

by David Guzik

David Guzik explores the historical development and theological distinctions between Orthodox Churches and Calvinism after Calvin, highlighting key figures and doctrines.

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Scripture: Romans 8:29

Topics: "Predestination vs Free Will", "Church History"

Description

David Guzik discusses the history of the Orthodox Churches and the evolution of Calvinism after John Calvin, highlighting the significant splits in Christianity, including the divide between Eastern and Western churches, and later between Protestant and Catholic traditions. He emphasizes the unique characteristics of the Orthodox Church, such as the use of icons and the importance of tradition, while also addressing the theological debates surrounding Calvinism and Arminianism, particularly the concepts of predestination and free will. Guzik concludes that the essence of salvation lies in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, rather than mere church affiliation, and encourages believers to focus on the Bible rather than rigid theological systems.

Transcript

The question was, what about the Russian Orthodox Church? Now, it's actually a good question to bring up, because you start out with the apostolic church, OK? The Church of the Apostles. Then you have some significant splits along the way, heretical groups, like the Arians, other heretical groups that come along. I could bore you with some names.

But then, the significant break you had in the original church was first between the West and the East, and you could say between Latin and Greek. This is the first significant, if you will, split in the church. So the Western church develops along its distinct lines.

The Eastern church develops along its Eastern lines. Well, the next very significant split that you had in the West is between Protestant and Catholic. Churches that come from the Orthodox, this is known as the Orthodox churches.

And here, you have churches that develop among national lines. You have the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian, the Bulgarian. I mean, individual countries.

And what happened was when the gospel came to Russia, it was brought by this branch of Christianity, and the Russian people and rulers embraced the church from the East. So that's why it's called the Russian Orthodox Church. It's not really like the Catholic church.

It's not really like a Protestant church. It developed along these lines out here from the Eastern. One of the characteristics of these Eastern or Orthodox churches is their use of icons.

Have you ever seen those specific paintings of saints? And oftentimes, it's a very stylized kind of painting with a saint with a halo behind it or this or that. And they actually use those paintings in their, they'll pray towards that painting. They'll bring in a painting or an icon, and everybody will stand.

And now, they would say that they don't worship it. They would say, we don't worship it. They'd say, it's an aid to our worship.

Orthodox means according to the truth, according to proper doctrine. And when you call yourself the Orthodox Church, it's like calling yourself the true church. So what are you implying when you call yourself the true church? You're saying that the other guys are not the true church.

Yeah, these guys think they have it right doctrinally in their practice and such, and that they're really the inherent. And this is kind of the debate here. Who truly carries on the apostolic church? Well, the Orthodox say we do.

The Catholics say we do. And the Protestants say we do. But these are the three major divisions or heads or categories of the Christian church today, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox.

I mean, you count it up over the world, and there's more than a billion people under the heading Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox. And are Orthodox people born again and such like that? Of course there's born again people in the Orthodox Church now. It may be even more rare to find born again people in the Orthodox Church than it is to find them in the Catholic Church.

But we just remember, belonging to any church isn't what makes you a believer. It's being a Christian. There's Protestant people who are going to hell.

There's people who attend the Catholic Church who are going to hell. There's people who attend Orthodox Churches who are going to hell. The bottom line is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

And there are people in the Orthodox Church who do, but it is a church that in many ways is incredibly bound up in the traditions of men and the customs and practices of that. For example, at an Orthodox service, I've been to a lot of Orthodox cathedrals and churches in Eastern Europe and such. An Orthodox service, you stand through the whole service.

So I mean, you could just think of people standing in what oftentimes a big, cold cathedral, standing for a two-hour service. They don't do mass, but they do similar to a mass. It's kind of similar to a mass, and you've got to stand through the whole thing.

A lot of this stuff in these churches, it's just for, that's what makes American Protestantism. And if you want to say Calvary Chapel, unique is that we, it would be foolish for us to say, for example, as Calvary Chapel,

that we don't have traditions. We certainly do have traditions, but how bound are you by your traditions? Are you willing to let them go if you see that they're getting in the way of doing the work of the church? And that's the real issue.

Are your traditions in the way? Traditions aren't a bad thing necessarily. But when they start getting in the way of the work God wants you to do, you've got to be ready to cut them loose. Legacy of the Reformation is what we're continuing in.

What we want to talk about here is Calvinism after John Calvin. Last week we talked about Lutheranism after Luther. We talked about the Anglican Church.

Now we want to talk about Calvinism after Calvin. There was a fellow who was a student of Calvin and Calvinism who took the name Jacob Hermanszoon. He was a Dutch man.

Now this is what you should know about Calvinism. You have reformed churches. And you'll hear people talk about reformed doctrine, reformed churches.

This actually is a whole collection of churches, including Lutheran. You could say Calvinistic. Most people would say Presbyterian.

You have Episcopalian or Anglican is usually put under this heading. So these are reformed churches. Now a lot of this was established by geography.

Lutheranism pretty much was confined to Germany and Scandinavia. Then you have the Calvinistic churches. Here you're talking about Switzerland, Scotland, Holland.

Big center for Calvinism in Holland. And there was a big movement in France under a group called the Huguenots. But they were always persecuted and oppressed.

The Roman Catholic Church still kept a pretty good hand over France. And then you got the Anglican, which of course would be in England. This fellow Jacob Hermanson was a Dutch man.

And he was a student of reformed theology. He studied at Geneva under a guy named Theodor Beza. I hope I'm pronouncing his name right, it could be Beza.

But this Beza fellow was Calvin's successor in Geneva, and he studied under him. And he was ordained in Amsterdam in the year 1588, this fellow Jacob. Now you get something from that date, 1588.

What was the date of the year of Luther nailing his, date of Martin Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses to the door in Wittenberg? 1517, so you're about 71 years after Martin Luther first started his thing. This guy was ordained. Now, in the year 1589, this fellow Jacob Hermanson, by the way, who took the Latin name, he went by the Latin name of Arminius.

This is the name by which he's far more commonly known, Arminius. He was called upon to defend the Calvinist doctrine of predestination in a debate. But as he did his studies, as he did his research, as he did his preparation for the debate, he found himself siding with his opponent against the Calvinist idea of predestination.

It's kind of interesting. Here's a guy ordained as a Calvinist pastor. And they say, okay, we're going to have a debate.

We want you to support the Calvinist position. He goes, okay, I better do my research. So I mean, here's a man of very solid Calvinist credentials, who through his own study, through his own investigation of scripture, believes that the Calvinist understanding of predestination is wrong.

Now, in the 1590s, he was lecturing in a theological school. And he questioned the Calvinist interpretation of Romans, chapter 7 and 9. And so there was a lot of suspicion around him. You know, he was kind of a controversial figure in his day.

He died in 1609. But Arminius never wanted to provoke a big confrontation. He never wanted a big public challenge of Calvinism.

That wasn't his style. So he lodged his complaints. He set out his own doctrinal course and such.

Now, this is kind of the bottom line here. Arminius believed that... It's hard to say these without putting it in a way that frames the discussion unfairly. One thing you have to understand, please understand this.

What we're talking about here is not necessarily what Calvin taught. And not necessarily what Arminius taught. But as their teaching has developed and come to be understood through the years.

Arminius believed that Jesus died and that God's grace made salvation possible. Calvin would say that the work of Jesus and God's grace accomplishes salvation. You see, there's kind of a difference there, isn't it? Because it's a different thing to say that it makes it possible or that... Well, what has to couple with God's grace to make salvation work? Well, Arminius said, man's choice.

Man's choice has to do it. The ultimate choice... In Arminius, the ultimate choosing is made by man. In Calvinism, the ultimate choice is made by God.

When I say choice, I mean ultimate choice. You ask a Calvinist, who made the choice for you to be saved? They would say God made it. You ask Arminius, who made the choice for you to be saved? The Arminius would say, I made it.

I mean, that's a different way of looking at it. So who made the choice for you to be saved? Was it God or was it man? Well, let me talk about predestination. Then you got predestination.

Here, God predestines according to his own will. Here, God predestines according to foreknowledge. In other words, why did God choose me? Because he knew I would choose him.

So who's doing the choosing? Well, no, I mean, under the system... The bottom line is, I'm doing the choosing. Because God only chose me because he knew I would choose him. His choice depends on mine.

Are you following this? There's a big difference. Does Jesus accomplish our salvation or does he make salvation possible? Does God choose us? Is that the ultimate choosing that goes on? Or is man the ultimate choosing that goes on? So, is predestination based on God's will or on just his foreknowledge of our choices? You know, and those are questions. So, when Arminius died, his followers came up with something called the remonstrance.

I believe the year was 1610. There were five points to the remonstrance. Number one, first point of the remonstrance was they believed that man cannot be saved or choose Christ without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

That was their first point. Number two, God's choice is based on his foreknowledge. Number three, the work of Jesus on the cross made it possible for all men to be saved, but it did not actually save anyone.

That work must be coupled with the faith of the individual to work for salvation. The cross is only effective if a person chooses to accept it. So, number three, we would say cross makes salvation possible.

Number four, the Holy Spirit cannot regenerate us until we believe, and his work of regeneration can be resisted by the individual. So, belief comes, let me put, no, let me say faith. Faith comes before born again.

In other words, you have to believe before you're born again, and that work of the Holy Spirit can be resisted. You can say no to the Holy Spirit. And then, finally, point number five is that you can lose your salvation.

These were the five points of the remonstrance. The original order of the, this was not the original order of the points. The original order was two, three, one, four, and five, but that's not important.

When the followers of Arminius, again, this is after he died. When the followers of Arminius started preaching this stuff, coming out with this, it raised a big controversy. This was a huge division in the Dutch Calvinist church.

What really made it sticky, too, is that the two different sides associated themselves with rival political factions, making things even worse. And for a while, it even seemed like an actual civil war would break out in Holland over these issues. So, to settle the issue, the anti-Arminians called a synod, and they responded with five points of their own.

Here are the five points of Calvinism. Now, what I want you to understand about the five points of Calvinism, which sometimes goes by the acronym TULIP, the five points of Calvinism were a response to the remonstrance. It's not like the Calvinists sat around and thought up five points.

The Arminians came out with their five points, and then the Calvinists said, okay, here's our five points. Number one, they said total depravity. Now, what it means, total depravity, is a way of saying total inability.

Now, on the surface of it, you might say, well, what could be wrong with anybody saying that you can't be saved or choose Christ without the help of the Holy Spirit? What could possibly be wrong with saying that? For the Calvinists to say, you're not going far enough. What do you mean you need the help of the Holy Spirit? You can't choose anything. You don't need help from the Holy Spirit.

He needs to do this work. You are totally unable to do anything to please God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. So that was the problem that they had with this.

They say you're not going far enough in this statement. Number two, the second one is unconditional election. Unconditional election.

This one says that choice is based on foreknowledge. Okay, now, if choice is based on foreknowledge, then God isn't really doing the choosing, right? Because he's just choosing based on your choice. If I say, let me put it this way.

If we go to the ice cream store together and I say, I'll choose whatever you do. And you say, okay, well, then I'll have Rocky Road. And I say, well, I'll have Rocky Road too.

You can't really say that I chose Rocky Road. I just said, I'm going to choose whatever you choose. You're the one really making the choice between the 31 flavors.

And I'm just saying, I'm going to go along with your choice. That's how Arminians say it works with this. Is that God just knows what we're going to choose.

And that's why he chooses us. Well, the Calvinists come back and say, what are you nuts? They say God chooses and he chooses unconditionally. Now, we'll talk about this in a minute.

This whole idea of double predestination. But that's, God says just, you know, here, the idea here is God just chooses because he chooses. All right, number three, limited atonement.

Now, the idea of limited atonement, I think, is oftentimes really misunderstood. And it's because there's different ways that this is believed among reformed people today or Calvinist people today. I'll give you the most standard way that I understand that this is taught.

The idea behind limited atonement is that Jesus only died to save the elect. Another way you could say Jesus only died to save the people who are going to heaven. You might say, well, you know, man, that sounds pretty exclusive.

Well, there is a logic behind it, okay? And I think we can be sympathetic with the logic. First of all, can you say that Jesus died to save the whole world? Well, sure, you can say Jesus died to save the whole world. Well, do you see how somebody could respond and say, well, then Jesus was a failure? Is the whole world saved? No, nobody believes the whole world's saved.

Well, then you're saying Jesus set out with the express purpose of saving the whole world, but he didn't accomplish it. So you're saying God's a failure. Wow, you know, nobody wants to say God's a failure.

On the other hand, you don't want to say that God just died for some people and didn't die for other people. And can I tell you the way that I think that you need to understand this? Limited atonement. Now, again, this is just saying that the cross made salvation possible, okay? That's what the Arminians would say.

The Calvinists would say, what, are you crazy? The cross didn't make my salvation possible. It accomplished my salvation. Jesus died to save me, not to make my salvation possible, but to save me.

Here's the way I would present to you the idea of limited atonement, is to say, in what way did Jesus die for the whole world? Well, first of all, he died to demonstrate God's love to the whole world, right? That goes out to everybody. I would say too, and I mean, I'm kind of analyzing here before we get through the whole list. I'd say that Jesus died to make salvation possible for the whole world, right? Anybody can come and trust in what Jesus did on the cross, right? Who's excluded? Nobody.

Anybody who will come, that's right. Anybody can come. So he died to demonstrate his love to the whole world.

He died to make salvation possible for the whole world. I would not say that Jesus died to save the whole world. He died to save those who would trust in him.

He died to save the elect. But he definitely died for the whole world in showing God's love to the whole world and in making salvation possible for the whole world because nobody's excluded. God's not going to... Nobody's going to come to Jesus and say, oh, you know, I want to trust in your work for me on the cross.

And God's going to say, well, forget you. I didn't die for you. That's never going to happen.

All right, number four, irresistible grace. Now, irresistible grace says, listen, you know, the point number four for the Calvinists or for the Armenians was that the Holy Spirit cannot regenerate us until we believe and his work of regeneration can be resisted. The Calvinists say, no, no.

Now, this maybe boils it down to the most essential dividing point. If you want one difference between Calvinism and Arminianism, between reformed and non-reformed, you want one difference, it's does faith come before regeneration or after? OK, do you know what we mean by regeneration? What's another way we describe regeneration? Right, being born again. OK, in other words, do you have to be born again so that you can believe or do you have to believe in order to be born again? You see, what the Calvinists would say, he would say, you are so lost, you're so corrupt, right? Totally deprived, you are totally unable.

That until God puts faith in you and makes you born again, you can't believe. So do you see how they see it? God regenerates you, then you believe in him. The Arminian says, no, I believe and then he regenerates me.

I'll give you another way that they say. The Calvinists would say you are dead in your trespasses and sins, right? You're dead. Now, what can you say to a dead man? What can you tell a dead man to do? Nothing, nothing.

You have to make him alive before he can do anything. That's why they say it's irresistible grace. When God makes you alive, you're alive.

When the Holy Spirit does this effectual work in you, it's irresistible. And you cannot resist it. Now, a Calvinist would never say that you cannot resist the work of the Holy Spirit because they know you can.

But they would say when God has ordained that a person is to be saved, that person is going to be saved. And that person is going to come to believe. That person is going to trust in Christ.

That's irresistible. Because otherwise, you could defeat God, right? And finally, number five, the perseverance of the saints. In other words, the Calvinist doctrine of this says that the true saints, the people who are born again, they will persevere to the end.

Meaning they won't fall away. If they were to fall away, they'll come back. But the true saints will persevere to the end.

And so you cannot lose your salvation. A Calvinist would say if you lose your salvation, you were never saved to begin with. You weren't really one of the saints.

But the true saints are going to persevere. Now, do you see why they call this TULIP? T-U-L-I-P. Total Pravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints.

So what about this? Well, I would rely, and you know what? I'm sorry, I don't even have these quotes in front of me. This battle between Calvinism and Arminianism has divided churches. This battle has divided

Calvary chapels.

There have been Calvary chapels who the pastors have gotten really passionate about Calvinistic doctrine. And they're very judgmental towards other Calvary chapels and say, you're not Calvinist enough. I even heard of a church, of a Calvary chapel that changed its name.

They separated from the Calvary chapel movement. And they called themselves Calvary Chapel Reformed. Isn't that heavy? What does the Bible teach about it all? I would say that if you want to boil it all down, that largely speaking, these two systems are true in what they affirm.

They are false in what they deny. One of the affirmations, for example, of Calvinism is that we are saved by God's grace and none of the credit goes to us. Can we agree that that's true? Absolutely.

That's scriptural. What a Calvinist might deny is that, therefore, and this is where we get into double predestination. Okay, the saved are predestined to be saved.

Well, what about the damned? The damned are predestined to be damned. They never had a choice. They never had a choice.

God didn't choose them. Now, true in what they affirm, false in what they deny. The Bible nowhere teaches double predestination.

Nowhere. Therefore, I can say with all confidence, when a man is saved, it's totally by the grace of God. When he's damned, it's totally on his own head.

True in what they affirm, wrong in what they deny. How about Arminianism? Arminianism says that man has a choice and that we must choose. Is that true? Absolutely, it's true.

We have a choice. Our choice isn't imaginary. Now, does that mean that our choice is more important than God's choice? No, that's wrong in what it denies.

See? So that's how I would generally take these two systems. And we could go through and discuss different fine theological points. If you guys have any specific questions, we can talk about and discuss them for a while.

Because there's so much in all this that we could talk about. Now, is there a connection between predestination and foreknowledge? Absolutely. Romans chapter 8 tells us, For whom he foreknew, he also predestined.

There's a connection between foreknowledge and predestination. But you know what I would say? And see if you can follow me on this. See if I can make myself understood.

There is absolutely a connection between foreknowledge and predestination. But I think it's wrong to say that God's predestination is totally based on his foreknowledge. Now, do you know why I say that? Because if it is, then God isn't choosing at all.

God isn't making a choice. It's like the ice cream thing, right? God isn't choosing anything then. But you can't deny that there's a connection between predestination and foreknowledge.

You say, well, how do you resolve this? Listen, any significant decision that you make in your life, do you ever make it for just one reason? Probably not. Any significant decision that you make, you probably make it for five reasons, right? There's five different things, some more important than the other, but there's no one single thing that was the sole cause of your choosing. You know, in the same way, I would say this is true of God's choice, of God's predestinating.

Foreknowledge has a place in it, right? No doubt about it. But is that the only thing that God bases his choosing on? No. God bases it on the eternal counsels of his will, on his own wisdom, on his own plan of this.

So you cannot take foreknowledge out of predestination, but you can't say that all predestination is foreknowledge. It's one aspect of it. So I think that's the way to see it.

So connection. Again, I think this is where people get screwed up. This is where people get messed up, is they get worried about a theological system.

There's a lot in reform doctrine or Calvinism that I believe, but I would never go by the name of a Calvinist. There's things in Arminian doctrine that I believe, I would never go by the name Arminian, because I don't want to identify myself with any theological system. I just want to identify myself with the Bible.

When I'm preaching on a passage that speaks about God's election and God's foreknowledge, the people probably walk out of the door going, man, that dude's a Calvinist. Now, when I'm preaching on a section that talks about man's responsibility and man's need to choose, I bet people walk out of the door going, man, that guy's an Arminianist. And that's exactly how I want it.

The problem comes for the Bible teacher or the Bible student, when you take a passage that speaks of man's choice and try to pretend that he doesn't really have a choice. Or when you take a section that speaks of God's election and try to talk as if God doesn't really have an election. Just let the Bible speak for itself.

I don't know why it is, but there is something about reformed doctrines that a lot of guys grab hold of them and they immediately cop an attitude. And their attitude is basically, everybody else is all wrong. I'm all right.

And it's got to be my mission in life to tell them how wrong I am, how wrong they are, and how right I am. You can have the correct doctrines. I don't know if you know this word, but be doctrinaire.

To be doctrinaire is to act all superior and proud and to have that proud bearing about your doctrine. And no love in dealing with other people who disagree with you. But when you get this doctrinaire attitude, man, it's like a cancer in the church.

Now, this is what boggles my mind. I don't know what it is. I don't know why it's much more common for reformed people to have this attitude than it is for Arminian people to have the attitude.

For every 10 bad attitude reformed people I know, I know one Arminian bad attitude guy who acts kind of this superior doctrinaire. You're so wrong and I got to prove you right. Let's battle over this.

I don't know why that is. The bottom line is I don't think anybody should identify themselves with a system. We're not Lutherans.

We're not Calvinists. We're not Smithians. We're Bible.

And so you teach the Bible and let it speak for itself. When it says you got to choose and whosoever will, then that's it, whosoever will. When it says that God's predestined you from before the foundation of the world, then that's what you teach.

You just let the, and you say, oh, wait a minute though, you got two different things. How can you reconcile them? How can you do this? God didn't tell you it's your job to reconcile it. You worry about your salvation and you worry if the Lord's going to love you tomorrow in this.

And you need to hear, you know what Miriam, God loved you from before the foundation of the world. Now you take somebody else over here and this guy is kicking back in a lifestyle of sin and saying, I can do whatever I want. You know what he needs to do? He needs to hear, buddy, if you don't clean up your walk, you're going to fall away.

It's like two different sides of a coin. Just for lack of better terms, you got predestination on one side, you got free will on the other side. Well, it's all part of the same coin, right? But you can't look at both sides of the coin at once.

You got one side and then you got the other. You can't look at both sides. You can't see heads and tails at the same time.

You can stand on its edge and try it, but you can't do it. Your vision won't let you do it. It's the same way.

It's all God's work in our life. It's all his work. It's all his revelation.

But there's just different aspects to it. Let's just put it this way. When it comes down to our salvation, who gets the glory for it? God and God alone.

When it comes to somebody being sent to hell, who gets the blame for it? Man and man alone. You know what? Next week may be our last week together on this, but we'll talk about revival and the enlightenment and stuff on into the 20th century a little bit. We'll wrap it up next week.

Father, we thank you for our time together here this morning. Father, we thank you that you chose us from before the foundation of the world. And we thank you, Lord, that we got to have a passionate commitment to walking with you and choosing you every day.

Help us with it, Lord. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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