

## JOHN CALVIN vs. JESUS CHRIST

*Calvinism* is a term with which most people are familiar. However, few people are conversant with its details, tenants and implications.

John Calvin was born early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and began his career as a Roman Catholic cleric. This subjected him to the influence of a 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop, Aurelius Augustine, known for championing the concept of man's total depravity popularly known as *original sin*. This doctrine assumes that since every human being is by birth in the lineage of Adam, he/she is therefore an heir of Adam's sin and is thereby alienated from God and so depraved as to be unable to even seek God, much less understand God's will and actually come to him.

Calvin would reject the authority of the Roman Pope early in his career and play a leading part in the Protestant Reformation. However, as with most of the reformers, Calvin did not leave everything of Roman Catholicism behind when he left it. Notably, he took with him the doctrine of *Original Sin*. Eventually, this doctrinal concept would become the basis and cornerstone of his five point system of theology represented by the acronym, TULIP, commonly referred to as "Calvin's TULIP."

The five points represented by Calvin's acronymic TULIP are summarized as follows. T stands for *total depravity* (as inherited from Adam by virtue of his "original sin." The U is for *unconditional election* (the idea that God has arbitrarily predestined certain individuals to be saved while at the same time withholding this blessing from others). L indicates *limited atonement* (based on the contention that Christ died only for those whom God predestined for salvation and that the atoning power of Christ's death is therefore limited to them.) I points to *irresistible grace* (assuming that regeneration is brought to the predestined sinner by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit acting upon him in a manner that cannot be resisted). And, finally, the P stands for *perseverance of the saints* (assuming that once a predestined individual has been irresistibly saved he cannot ever fall away from the Lord so as to become lost; popularly referred to by the tag, "once saved, always saved.")

Calvin cannot be faulted for lack of intellect. To the contrary, the five points of his TULIP flow logically from the presumption of man's *total depravity*. Intellect can be faulty, however, especially when its logic is based on a false premise—in Calvin's case the presumption of inherited total depravity. Calvin assumed children are born in sin. But Jesus said, "...of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). Believing the Son of God knew more about it than did Calvin, it is incumbent on us to study Calvin's TULIP within the contrast provided by the word of God. So we shall. —Jerry F. Bassett