

Evangelism and Election

What are the prospects of Calvinism in North America today? Not encouraging. Its critics call its view of God undemocratic, even harsh. And its doctrine of salvation is considered deterministic.

In our age of science, we find mysteries hard to accept. Everything is supposed to be explainable. But neither science nor theology are without their mysteries. In Scripture we find the tension between God's choice of the sinner and the sinner's choice of God. Salvation is from beginning to end the work of God, who is merciful, gracious, just and loving. We are saved by grace. God reaches out to us before we had any intention of reaching out to Him. But doesn't the doctrine of election hinder mission work? Why missions if God chooses whom He wills? But contrary to popular opinion, Calvinism has done more for missions and evangelism than any other "branch" of Christianity. North America's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards (1709-1758), became one of the most important leaders of the Great Awakening, a revival movement which changed the course of American history. The greatest service Edwards rendered to the cause of missions was his emphasis on God's electing grace *and* his firm belief in the general offer of salvation. This same emphasis is also found in John Calvin's writings. In missions we work as if everything depends on man, while knowing that salvation is entirely of God. A tremendous comfort for any missionary! Probably no one ever preached the doctrine of election more consistently and persuasively over a longer period of time than the Calvinist Baptist Charles Spurgeon (1894-1892).

Why teach election? Because this doctrine is scriptural. Many lengthy volumes have been written on this subject. For a brief but excellent overview I suggest *Calvinism, Hyper Calvinism and Arminianism* by Kenneth G. Talbot and W. Gary Crampton, published by Still Waters Revival Books, 12810-126 St., Edmonton, AB T5L 0YL.

Johan Tangelder