

MAJOR AND MINOR CALVINISM TERMS

A Response

By

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The term 'minor' may not be the best term to use without further clarification or to use as the only descriptive term of my position; therefore, I do try to use various terms and descriptions from time to time. However, I think 'minor Calvinism' is a good term both biblically and theologically. Actually there is not a term, to my knowledge, that does not leave some questions unanswered even 'Biblical Christian' or "Biblicist" are taken by everyone who disagrees with me as though I am saying they are heterodoxy--as I recall I did use the term Biblicist in the context of 'minor'. After I used the terms Calvinism and Arminianism, I went on to explain the relationship between predestination, foreknowledge, free choice etc. in a way that neither a Major Calvinist nor an Arminian would accept--this was confirmed to me by two Calvinist who talked to me one Sunday morning and the other Sunday night. I think my description of the topic explained what I mean by 'minor Calvinist'.

As I teach on this subject, answer e-mails etc., I often use minor Calvinism in order to express my position. As you know, the term Calvinism is a broad term encompassing many degrees, five point Calvinism signifies five point and up and moderate Calvinism is a theological term that generally means a four point Calvinist or less. As you will notice, I do not use five point, four point three point...--not just because of what I said tongue and cheek Sunday, but because they are not descriptive of my position--although four point was for several years.

The terms 'major' and 'minor' Calvinist, as far as I know¹, are terms that I developed in order to succinctly and accurately distinguish between all of the variations within the discussions concerning predestination, election, foreknowledge, free will, etc, and thereby allowing me to teach on these deep subjects without having to choose between surface teaching and/or theological error. In order to answer the questions that revolve around these topics, in a substantive and accurate way, which treats all of the various beliefs according to their stated positions, I have to be able to summarize some things. The terms major and minor allow me to deal with an incredibly deep subject and answer perplexing questions in a manner that is accurate and hopefully not overly complicated further with distinctions and technical terms, although some of that is inevitable with a topic such as this.

For example, there are variations of five point Calvinist, there is theological hyper-Calvinism, folk five point, folk hyper and variations of the integration of the order of decrees concerning when God decided to create, allow the fall, provide redemption...all of which affect the former. In teaching, I quote from all sorts (like when I taught on this for three months in 1 Peter 1), but I am careful to use them to only demonstrate the essence of five point Calvinism, which would be true of all true five pointers and up, unless otherwise stated.

¹ At least I am defining them to fit my usage and not to incorporate how they may be understood elsewhere.

I do not want to intentionally misrepresent someone's position, yet, time does not allow, nor is it a proper forum for delving into the many distinctions. However, I do not want to deal with it in a superficial way that leaves it looking like five point Calvinist are the only ones with a good explanation. This has bothered me for years. Normally, when those who are not what I call Major Calvinist deal with this subject in church, it is done in a manner than seems trite compared to the answers given by Major Calvinist. The use of the terms major and minor allow me to deal with the subject in a way, that undermines major Calvinist dominance, and demonstrates that there is a better way to interpret Scripture with regard to the questions about salvation.

As you well know, historically and even today, it is common to understand Baptist as being Calvinistic in our theology, which is understood as being more in that direction than in the direction of Arminianism--and that is all one can legitimately derive from that term. This is a very common designation used by preachers, theologians and Christians, regardless of their theological persuasion. This term is not used because we agree with the five pointers on some things, but rather it describes a *tendency* between two ideas.

Consequently, the terms Calvinistic or minor Calvinism, is not just signifying some things in common with Calvinist--like the Muslim example--but rather that which is most descriptive of some of the basic tenets between two positions. A theological example of this in another area is dispensationalism and covenant theology. We both agree on certain things, but it would not be accurate to describe me as a minor covenant theologian; however, I could use that term in context of referring to classical dispensationalism. Baptist are, by all that I am aware of, Calvinistic. I know personally men like Dr. Patterson, Dr. Land, Dr. Rogers etc, use that designation or description, and they are as adamantly against five point Calvinism as any theologians I know.

I think we need to take equal care not to imply that we are Arminian as well. Because of some of my beliefs--eternal security, vast array of scriptural interpretations--I am much closer to Calvinism; although, I disagree with them adamantly on some issues. Nevertheless, if I have to answer which of the two poles I am closer to, I would say Calvinism.

I have tried to explain my understanding of scripture on this in several places like; Chapter two of my book deals with this, the three month series on 1 Peter, two weeks in Ephesians, and on numerous other occasions. Each time, there is something else that could be said, but it is impossible to say each thing each time, and answers on this subject always birth more questions. Every time that I am asked about anything to do with this subject, I make sure they know that I do not accept the Tulip. I explain, as time will permit, and I encourage them to listen to the tapes. I am convinced that if people listen to my teachings on this they will know my position.

I honestly, do not know how I can teach on this subject, in the depth, without having some terms that, although lacking, do help to draw some lines of demarcation. Trust me, the Calvinist don't like my take on things.

Minor Calvinism is a term that describes my position when contrasted to Major Calvinism like I did on Sunday morning. A critical aspect of Minor Calvinism is that every person receives a 'real' choice of whether to be saved or not. Each time that I deal with this subject, I try to emphasize that. That statement alone disestablishes the Tulip as defined in major Calvinism. It actually digs much deeper than just rejecting limited atonement. It actually extends to a rejection of the meaning of the adjectives they use to describe the five petals in the way they define them.

In another words, one cannot explain 'choice' in the way that I do and define the tulip the way Calvinist do; therefore, although, at the moment it did not seem to set me apart from the negative aspects of major Calvinism it does so and does so in a very definite manner. The real problem that I have with major Calvinism, and I think that you do also, is the adjectives they use in the Tulip and how that predetermines their definition and interpretation of otherwise biblical concepts.

Indebted

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