

July 21, 2006

Pastor Shawn was asked to write an article on the following subject for one of our Alabama Baptist Publications called "The Christian Life Report." Copies should be available after the first of August. He wanted to provide this article to our church family to remind us that rather than being Calvinists or Non-Calvinists, we are a church family that is about being "Biblicists."

CAN CALVINISTS AND NON-CALVINISTS CO-EXIST?

Yes; we can and we should. As the debate over the "Doctrines of Grace" rages in the churches and in our denomination, it is evident that we have forgotten something important: LOVE. 1 Cor. 13:2 says, "**And if I have {the gift of} prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.**" If we read the whole chapter and apply it to this situation, conviction falls immediately upon us all.

I am amazed at how some Calvinists can be so puffed up with pride in light of such a humbling doctrine. I am likewise amazed at how Non-Calvinists can react so angrily on the basis of tradition and here-say regarding what is actually Hyper-Calvinism. The simple fact of the matter is that as Baptists, we have much more ground for agreement than disagreement.

Both groups believe that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of God, that God is sovereign, and that man is endowed with a will through which he makes real choices with real consequences. Both groups believe that all men are sinners, that Jesus died on the cross to atone for sin, that explicit faith in Christ alone is the only way to be saved, and that every Christian is to have a passion for evangelism. When we allow disunity to ensue in our ranks over subsequent truths, we fall into disobedience and lose our witness (John 13:34-35). Furthermore, we lose sight of what we should be doing: searching and studying the Scriptures together as loving brethren to deepen our understanding and to edify the body.

So how do we get along? **First, drop the labels.** Labels and scripturally unfounded accusations only serve to divide. The only label we should bear out is that of being "Biblicists." **Second, realize that "doctrine" is not a dirty word.** In the Bible, the words "all" and "whosoever will" appear right along side of the words "election" and "predestined." Much like the doctrine of the Trinity, there are some truths that are hard to reconcile, but that does not give any of us the right to dismiss what Scripture clearly teaches just because it doesn't support our personal view.

Finally, fervently pursue love and unity in Christ. Move quickly to chasten those on either side who would bring discord into the body. We must never sacrifice biblical truth on the altar of love. Instead, we should sharpen one another through honest biblical discussions conducted in a safe church environment, all while demonstrating the love of Christ to the world.