



## Exegesis & Eisegesis; Calvin's Confusion: *Institutes* are Limited Atonement but *Commentaries* Are Unlimited; Impact of Limited Atonement: Calvin to Arminius

63. Exegesis comes from the Greek word **ἐξηγήσις, *exēgēsis*** which means “exposition, explanation, interpretation out from the source.” The prefix *ex-* means “out from” and *-gēsis* means “to explain or interpret.” The application to theology is defined as “the grammatical, etymological interpretation of Scripture out from its original languages.”
64. Eisegesis comes from the Greek word **εἰσηγήσις, *eisēgēsis*** which means “to bring in, to introduce, to propose.” The prefix *eis-* means “into” and *-gēsis* again means “to explain or interpret.” The application to theology is defined as “the interpretation of a text by reading into it one’s own ideas.”
65. The Reformers consequently were handicapped by a tendency to eisegete Scripture from a flawed inventory of ideas. This resulted in the fact that their writings often contradicted themselves and naturally contradicted the biblical message.
66. In the case of Calvin it is asserted by those who subscribe to his theology that he taught limited atonement in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The first edition was published in August of 1536 with other editions being released through 1559.
67. Later Calvin wrote his *Commentaries* which included most of the books of the Old and New Testaments. His commentaries on Isaiah (1550) and John (1553) clearly reveal a view of unlimited atonement. This is confirmed by:

**Hunt, Dave. *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*. (Sisters: Loyal Publishing, 2002), 252-53:**

At times Calvin himself seemed to be ambivalent on this subject. He made statements both supporting unlimited atonement and at other times in favor of limited atonement. Referring to Isaiah 53:12 he said, “... on Him was laid the guilt of the whole world. [It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that ‘many’ sometimes denotes ‘all’.]” Concerning Mark 14:24, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many,” Calvin said, “The word *many* does not mean a part of the world but the whole human race. On 1 John 2:2, Calvin declared, “Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and in the goodness of God is offered unto all men without distinction, his blood being shed ... for the whole human race.”

68. The point is that the five points of Calvinism are not essentially taken from the writings of Calvin but rather from those who “interpreted” what he wrote after his death. The most prominent was Theodore Bèza:

**Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. New ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), 38:**

J. S. Bray (in his book) *Theodore Bèza's Doctrine of Predestination*, sees Bèza as ‘a transitional figure who bridged the gap’ between Calvin and ‘Reformed orthodoxy.’ Bèza is not merely a bridge but the architect of a system fundamentally different from Calvin’s.

69. These “differences” accumulated during the 55 years between Calvin’s death in 1564 and the Canons of the Synod of Dort in 1619. These Canons spelled out the theology that has become known as five-point Calvinism but it was the expression of half a century of poor scholarship, rampant eisegesis, and personal opinions that have led to the most convoluted accumulation of contradictions ever assembled in Protestant history.



70. The result of the Synod of Dort is a theology that asserts that God sovereignly selected a predetermined few in eternity past for salvation. Having done so, He then created man with the full knowledge that the fall would occur. He allegedly permitted the fall with the clear knowledge that the nonelect would remain eternally condemned.

#### IV. The Impact of Limited Atonement

1. We will note the development of the Doctrine of Assurance from Calvin to the Westminster Confession and its impact on Protestant denominations today:

**Dillow, Joseph C. *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*. 2d ed. (Hayesville: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 250; 261-66:**

**John Calvin (1509-1564).** What is the basis of assurance according to Calvin? Christ is the source of our assurance. How? It is on the basis of His atoning work. We are to **look to Christ** who is the pledge of God's love for us [*Commentary*, Jn 15:9]. When we look to Him, He pledges eternal life to us. Unless we **cling steadfastly to Christ**, we will "vacillate continually" [*ibid.*, Jn 17:17]. (p. 250)

**Theodore Bèza (1519-1605).** Calvin's successor at Geneva departed from Calvin and grounded assurance in **evidences of fruit in the life**. Bèza's starting point was his doctrine of limited atonement [*Kendall, Calvin & English Calvinism*, 13-18]. He developed a system that became known as supralapsarianism. (p. 261)

Bèza logically works out his system so that Jesus is the savior of the elect before their creation or fall. Assurance is thus grounded on two things: the election of God and the knowledge that we are among the ones who have been offered a redeemer, for **not all have**. For Bèza, if the **knowledge** that Christ died for us can be obtained, then we may be certain that we will not perish.

Bèza suggests that we should **look within ourselves for the evidence** that Christ died for us. We cannot comprehend God's eternal decrees, but we can see if He is **at work in our lives**. (p. 262)

**William Perkins (1558-1602).** The fountainhead of the experimental predestinarian's tradition. ["One who is born again cannot lose his salvation and will necessarily and inevitably continue in good works until the end of life." (p. 20)] He developed a system of assurance built around the interpretation of **2 Pet. 1:10** which says **we must prove our election to ourselves by means of good works**.

According to him, 2 Pet. 1:10 teaches us to prove to ourselves that we have faith **by means of a good conscience**. Justifying faith is that by which a man is persuaded in his conscience. The will **to believe does not yield assurance**, but the conscience, **reflecting on the fruits of regeneration**, can. (p. 263)

There are two works of grace necessary: initial faith and perseverance. Only **the second ultimately proves that the first is valid**. If godliness is the means by which we make our calling and election sure, then the Experimental Predestinarians reasoned, we had better give a list of what it means to be godly and how to become godly. This led to the **legalism for which Puritanism is noted** and the heavy sobriety and lack of joy which is so proverbial in their churches.

Various Puritan divines discerned varying bases for assurance. For some it was **keep a pure heart**. Others based it upon a **feeling**, others on being **in love with godliness**, others on being **sincere**, and others in **keeping of the law**. (p. 265)

**Jacob Arminius (1559-1609).** He studied under Bèza in Geneva. After taking a pastorate in Amsterdam in 1587, he was asked to defend Bèza's doctrine of predestination in the light of a pamphlet circulating against it. However, after studying the matter further, he became a convert to the very opinions he had been asked to refute. (p. 265)



His doctrine of predestination was simple: God predestines believers. If one believes, he is elected; if he does not believe, he is not elected. Man chooses to believe; thus faith is an act of the will. However, **Arminius believes salvation can be lost** [therefore he did not believe in the doctrine eternal security]. (pp. 265-266)

2. From this debate emerged a number of Protestant theologies. We have been noting hyper-Calvinism. In opposition to this were the doctrines of Jacob Arminius.
3. Arminius supported the unlimited atonement view but he also had an erroneous interpretation of 2 Peter 1:10. Whereas the hyper-Calvinists cite this verse to either confirm or deny election, Arminius referenced it to affirm his view that one can lose his salvation.
4. Obviously then, our theology is not hyper-Calvinist nor is it Arminian. We believe in unlimited atonement and eternal security. If a label is needed we would be moderate Calvinists. However the far better term is Biblicist. Many of the denominations in America base their doctrines of atonement and security on principles that were established in the Westminster Confession.