Calvinism Conflates Authority and Control

The longer I am a parent, the more I understand authority, and the less I exercise control, and the more I understand both.

Let me explain.

When my children were small, I had authority, but really just exercised control: toddlers do not understand a stove top could be hot, or that an electrical outlet could be dangerous, so I had to exercise control (manually removing them from the danger). Yes, I had authority, but authority does not translate to a hyper two-year old like control does. “Stop! Don’t!”, simply does not have the same certainty as simply exercising control and removing your child from danger. Every parent who has not acted quick enough regrets this looking back.

With age, authority plays much more of a role, if not really all of it: I cannot even remember the last time I physically removed one of my children from something dangerous. Instead, now, I exercise my authority: I am in charge, I do teach them, warn them, and reward/punish depending on their choices. And that’s just it – my authority’s actions change upon their choices. My authoritative status remains the same, but how I use it changes based on what they choose. I exercise actually very little control/direct intervention as my children age, mature, and grow up. And really, Amen, right?!

Calvinism never sees the difference. In Calvinism, we are spiritual toddlers always – God must control us to be saved (their understanding of regeneration). He must control us to do what is right (their understanding of sanctification), and if He doesn’t (i.e., unconditional election!), we burn our hand/body on the stove, so to speak – to hell we go. Oh – and in Calvinism – it’s our fault that our Parent (God) did not keep us from burning. According to Calvinism, our two-year old selves should know better!

Yet, the language in the New Testament consistently speaks of growth – starting out as spiritual babes to those who can handle the “meat” of the Word of God (Hebrews 6). We grow from young in the faith to seasoned in the faith (Titus 1). We start out immature and inconsistent (John Mark young) to matured and useful (also John Mark, only later). If Calvinism were true – we are chosen, God is sovereign – and that is it. Since God only exercises control in Calvinism, His authority – while certainly there – is pointless. It is like a child with a toy – he is in control of the toy – but does not exercise authority over it. Even if he says he does – even if he pretends – it makes no difference. The toy only acts if he acts up on it. This is simply control. It is simply impossible to exercise authority over an object with no self-willed choices to make.

Calvinism has enjoyed a resurgence in our fatalistic/nihilistic culture, and for good reason – it is the religious version of the same thing. Feeling hopeless? At least it is not your fault. God will either lift you up or not, so no reason to try to do anything about it. Feeling like there’s no point to life? Well, there is no point, unless God chooses for you. It is the religious version of our “no personal responsibility” culture. It makes those who think they are “elect” feel smugly-secure and those who feel hopeless justified in their despair.

Honestly, how sick, and how Satanic. What is the Bible’s antidote to these terrible ideas?

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Repentance and baptism are the proper responses to the Word of Christ (Acts 2:38). Faithfulness until death is God’s expectation (Revelation 2:10).

Perhaps Don Hunt put it best – “God does the providing, we do the partaking.” Faith, repentance, and baptism are acts of God – not of man. We cannot take credit for that which we did not invent, empower, or sustain. Would we ever give ourselves credit for a car we were given for free? Of course not. God has done it all – the only question is – will we partake?