

Q. Do you consider Martin Luther a Calvinist, since he believed in loss of salvation?

A. Strictly speaking, Martin Luther (1483–1546) could not be called a Calvinist since he did not follow Calvin. Luther started the Reformation in 1517, while John Calvin (1509–1564) did not write the first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion until 1536.

Luther does not develop the doctrines that have come to be known as the Five Points of Calvinism to anywhere near the extent that they would later be developed, and because of this his stand on some points is not as clear as many later Reformers. But Luther does seem to have been in basic agreement with the five points. Some authors, usually Lutherans, deny this, but other authors make a good argument for it. (An article by Brian G. Mattson called "Double or Nothing: Luther's Doctrine of Predestination" is a good introduction. See http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/double_luther.html).

While some deny that Luther believed in the perseverance of the saints, Luther's own words say otherwise. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther wrote, "Even if he [the saint] wants to, he cannot lose his salvation, however much he sin, unless he will not believe. For no sin can condemn him save unbelief alone. All other sins—so long as the faith in God's promise made in baptism returns or remains—all other sins, I say, are immediately blotted out through that same faith, or rather through the truth of God, because He cannot deny Himself." Luther believed that the only sin that would cause a man to lose his salvation was the sin of unrepentant unbelief; i.e. if someone permanently turned from Christ. The Calvinist response to this is that if someone who appears to have been a Christian permanently turns from Christ, he was never elect and was never really saved. And Luther may not have disagreed with that position. After all, Luther believed in predestination and that salvation was an act of God's sovereignty; therefore, someone's unrepented unbelief would also have to be an act of God's sovereignty upon someone who was not predestined to salvation.

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