

set forth at the Reformation, and formulated by the French theologian John Calvin, the *Synod of Dort* formulated its *Five Points of Calvinism* to counter the Arminian system. These can be set forth in the form of an acrostic on the word TULIP, as follows: **Total Depravity** (Total Inability), **Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement** (Particular Redemption), **Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints**.

These completely oppose the *Five Points of Arminianism*. Man is totally unable to save himself on account of the Fall. If unable to save himself, then God must save. If God must save, then God must be free to save whom he will. If God has decreed to save whom he will, then it is for those that Christ made atonement on the cross. If Christ died for them, then the Holy Spirit will effectually call them into that salvation. If salvation then from the beginning has been of God, the end will also be of God, and the saints will most surely persevere.

These are the *Five Points of Calvinism*. Charles Spurgeon himself said, “It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching no new doctrine. I love to proclaim those strong old doctrines that are nicknamed ‘Calvinism’, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.”

(1) Total Depravity. What is the *condition* of those who are to be saved? If we have defective views of sin, we’ll have defective views of the means necessary for the salvation of a sinner. If we believe that the Fall of man was merely *partial*, then we’ll most likely be satisfied with a salvation that can be attributed, *partly to man, and partly to God*.

Total depravity does not mean that every man is as evil as he could possibly be, nor that he is unable to do any good towards his fellow man, or even give outward allegiance to the worship of God. When man fell in the Garden of Eden, he fell in his *“totality.”* The whole personality of man has been affected by the Fall, and sin extends to the whole of his faculties—the *will*, the *understanding*, and the *affections*.

The Bible clearly teaches these things about the natural man: He is **DEAD**: “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (*Rom 5:12*). He is **BOUND**: “Instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (*2Tim 2:25-26*). He is **BLIND** and **DEAF**: “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables; that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand” (*Mark 4:11,12*). He is **UNINSTRUCTABLE**: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (*1 Cor 2:14*). He is **NATURALLY SINFUL**: *by birth*: “shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin” (*Psalms 51:5*); *by practice*: “God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Gen 6:5*).

Can the *dead* raise themselves? Can the *bound* free themselves? Can the *blind* give themselves sight, or the *deaf* hearing? Can the *slaves* redeem themselves? Can the *uninstructable* teach themselves? Can the *naturally sinful* change themselves? Surely not: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (*Job 14:4*). “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (*Jer 13:23*).

Could the Bible show more plainly that man’s depravity is **total**, and that his inability to desire or procure salvation is also **total**? The picture is one of death—*spiritual death*. We’re like Lazarus in his tomb, bound hand and foot; corruption has taken hold upon us. As there was no glimmer of life in Lazarus, so there is no “inner receptive spark” in our hearts. But the Lord performs the miracle both with the physically dead, and the spiritually dead; for “you hath he quickened [made alive] who were *dead* in trespasses and sins” (*Eph 2:1*).

(2) Unconditional Election. This doctrine is set forth in the *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, which we here quote as a convenient summary. It is also stated in almost identical terms in the *Westminster Confession* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England and all the major confessions:

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto. (*Chapter 3, Article 5*)

The story of the Bible is the story of **unconditional election**. Many people fail to see this. Some believers have difficulty in believing that God could pass by some and choose others, and yet they have no apparent difficulty in believing that God called Abraham out of heathen Ur of the Chaldees and left the others to their heathenism. Why would God, completely disregarding the family laws of Israel, choose the younger son Jacob, in place of the elder Esau? Paul says, “that the purpose of God according to election might stand...Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated” (*Rom 9:11-13*).

Jesus plainly taught **unconditional election** in the synagogue at Nazareth—“I tell you, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah...but unto none of them was Elijah sent save unto a woman of Sarepta...and many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha...and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian” (*Luke 4:25-27*). We know the outcome of our Lord preaching that message: “They led him to the brow of the hill that they might cast him down headlong.”

God’s choice of his people is **sovereign**—“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (*John 15:16*); “Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one lump unto honour and another to dishonour?” (*Rom 9:21*). “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (*Rom 9:15*). “Chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world” (*Eph 1:4-5*). “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (*2 Thess 2:13*).

There is a kind of election held by many today based on the words “whom he did *foreknow*, he also did predestinate” (*Rom 8:29*). They believe that God *foresaw* those who were going to accept Christ, and therefore he “elected” them to eternal life. But God’s foreknowledge always refers to *people*, not *actions* of those people—“*whom* he did foreknow.” “*You* only have I *known* of all the families of the earth” (*Amos 3:2*). That is, without regard to any action, good or bad, performed by them, God “knew” them in the sense that he loved and chose them to be his own. This is how he “foreknew” his elect—chosen not “*because of* good works” but “*unto* good works” (*Eph 2:10*). How could God have foreseen our faith when Paul says so clearly that faith is “not of yourselves: it is *the gift of God*” (*Eph 2:8*). Election is not on account of our believing, but our believing is on account of our being elected—“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (*Acts 13:48*).

(3) Limited Atonement. The central fact of the gospel is the purpose of Christ’s death. The theologians who were defending the truths of the Protestant Reformation from the attacks of the Arminians followed a biblical and logical line in their formulations and had now arrived at the very pivot of salvation. The question arose: Whose punishment did Christ bear at the cross, and whose salvation did he procure? There are three ways this can be answered: **(1)** Christ died to save *all men* without distinction, **(2)** Christ died to save *no one* in particular, **(3)** Christ died to save *a certain number*.

The first view is held by *Universalists*, that Christ died to save all men, and so, they logically assume, all men will be saved. If Christ has paid the debt of sin, has saved, ransomed, given his life for all men, then all men will be saved. The second view is held by *Arminians*, that although Christ paid the debt of our sin, his work on the cross does not become effectual until man “decides for” Christ and is thereby saved. The third view is the *Calvinistic* one; it says that Christ died positively and effectually to save a certain number on whom the Father had already set his free electing love. The Son pays the debt for these elect ones, makes satisfaction for them to the Father’s justice, and imputes his own righteousness to them so that they are complete in him.

Christ’s death, then, could only have been for one of these three reasons: to save all, to save no one in particular, to save a particular number. The third view is that which is held by the Calvinist and is generally called **limited atonement**, or **particular redemption**. Christ died to save a particular number of sinners: those “chosen in him before the foundation of the world” (*Eph 1:4*); those whom the Father had “given him out of the world” (*John 17:9*); those for whom he said he shed his blood: “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins” (*Mat 26:28*).

This last view does justice to why Christ died: “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for *he shall save his people from their sins*” (*Mat 1:21*)—not the Jews, for the Jews are not saved as a people. Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (*Eph 5:25*). “He was delivered for *our* offenses, and raised again for *our*

justification” (*Rom 4:25*). Paul is speaking to believers! “As in Adam *all* die, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive” (*1 Cor 15:22*). This can only mean that *all* of Adam’s posterity died in him, and *all* of Christ’s posterity—the church that he gave himself for—are made alive in him. Why is this? Surely, it is because he gave himself for them! “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant *justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.*” And when he accomplishes this in his death, “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and *shall be satisfied*” (*Isaiah 53:11*). The travail of his soul at Calvary shall bear spiritual children, and he shall be satisfied when he sees this work accomplished.

We do not overlook the fact that there are some Scriptures which refer to the “world,” and many have taken these as their starting point in the question of Redemption. However, when we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that the use of the word “world” need not imply *every person* in the world. They said of Jesus, “behold, *the world* is gone after him”; but *every person* had not gone after him. The expression means “every kind of person”—and normally Gentile as well as Jew. The over-riding question must always be the Divine intention: Did God intend to save all men, or did he not? If he did not intend to save all men without exception, but only the elect, then the death of Christ is a glorious success, as Jesus said: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (*John 6:37*). If, on the other hand, it was God’s intention to save everyone in the world, then Christ’s death was a failure, for vast numbers have not been saved. Christ paid our debt! Whose debt? everyone’s, or the elect’s? Surely, if a man has been redeemed by a Redeemer, then the law which he has broken must be satisfied by reason of the work of the Surety on his behalf.

(4) Irresistible Grace. This fourth point of Calvinism is, once again, the logical outcome of all that has gone before. If men are unable to save themselves, and if God has purposed to save them, and Christ has accomplished their salvation, then it logically follows that God must also provide the means for *calling* them into the benefits of that salvation which he has procured for them. The Calvinistic system of the theology, however, although soundly logical, is more than a system of mere logic. It is a system of pure Biblical belief which stands firmly on the Word of God. Its doctrine of **irresistible grace**, then, is not devised by the men who drew up the Five Points of Calvinism at the Synod of Dort, but is the revelation unfolded in God’s Holy Word. For example, Romans 8:30: “Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also *called.*” God not only elected men and women to salvation; he also *called* those whom it pleased him to elect.

What is meant by **irresistible grace**? We know that when the gospel call goes out, not everyone heeds that call; not everyone becomes convinced of sin and his need of Christ. This signifies that there are *two calls*. There is not only an *outward* call; there is also an *inward* call. For a person to be saved, the outward call must be accompanied by the inward call of God’s Spirit, who “convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment.” This call is *irresistible*: it cannot be frustrated.

The Five Points of Calvinism

There is scarcely another word that arouses such suspicion, mistrust, and even animosity among professing Christians as *Calvinism*. And yet much of the zeal that is leveled against this system and those who hold and preach it is most certainly a zeal *not according to knowledge*. This tract is written in the hope that much of the abuse that is hurled at the Calvinistic system of theology will be withdrawn, and that the truth of that great teaching, which was the backbone of our fathers in the faith, and the strength of the church in a far more glorious era than our own, will be clearly seen.

We must take our starting point in Holland in the year 1610. **James Arminius**, a Dutch professor, had just died and his teaching had been formulated into *five main points* of doctrine by his followers—known as *Arminians*. Up to this point, the churches of Holland, in common with the other major Protestant churches of Europe, had subscribed to the *Belgic and Heidelberg Confessions of Faith*, which were both set squarely on *Reformation* teachings. The Arminians wanted to change this position; thus they presented their five points in the form of a *Remonstrance* (protest) to the Dutch Parliament. Broadly speaking, the **Five Points of Arminianism** were:

(1) Free will (human ability). This taught that man, while affected by the Fall, is not totally unable to choose spiritual good, but is capable of exercising faith in God to receive the gospel, and thus bring himself into possession of salvation.

(2) Conditional election. This taught that God chose those individuals whom, he knew (*foresaw*) would respond to the gospel. God elected those that he saw would want to be saved of their own free will and in their natural fallen state.

(3) Universal redemption (or general atonement). This taught that Christ died to save all men; but only in a potential fashion. Christ's death enabled God to pardon sinners, but only on condition that they believed.

(4) Resistible grace. This taught that the Holy Spirit, as he worked to bring a person to Christ, could be effectually resisted and his purposes frustrated. He could not impart life unless the sinner was willing to have this life imparted.

(5) Falling away. This taught that a saved man could fall finally from salvation. It is, of course, the logical and natural outcome of the system. If man must take the initiative in his salvation, he must retain responsibility for the final outcome.

The *Five Points of Arminianism* were presented to the State and a *National Synod* of the church was called to meet in Dort in 1618 to examine the teaching of Arminius in the light of Scripture. The *Synod of Dort* sat for 154 sessions over a period of *seven months*, but at the end could find *no ground* on which to reconcile the Arminian viewpoint with that expounded in the Word of God. Reaffirming the position so unmistakably

God's Word teaches this: "*All* that the Father *giveth me shall come* to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (*John 6:37*). Those whom the Father has *given to Christ*, the elect, *shall come* to him; and when they come to him they will not be *cast out*. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me *draw him*" (*John 6:44*). Here our Lord is simply saying that it is impossible for men to come to him of themselves; the Father must "draw them." "Every man, therefore, that hath *heard*, and hath *learned* of the Father, cometh unto me" (*John 6:45*). Men may hear the outward call; but it is those who have "learned of the Father" who will respond and come to Christ. So, with Simon Peter: "Blessed art thou Simon...for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven" (*Matt 16:17*). "When it pleased God, who...*called* me by his grace" (*Gal 1:15*).

One outstanding illustration of this teaching of irresistible grace, or effectual calling, is certainly the incident that we read in Acts 16. The apostle Paul preaches the gospel to a group of woman by the riverside at Philippi; and as he does so "a certain woman named Lydia heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened*, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul" (*v14*). Paul, the preacher, spoke to Lydia's ear—the *outward* call; but the Lord spoke to Lydia's heart—the *inward* call of irresistible grace.

Arminians believe that people can and do resist the call of God's gospel, and, therefore, they contend, there can be no such doctrine as irresistible grace. We believe that not only can people resist God's gospel, but that they do, and *must* by their very nature, resist it. Therefore, there *must* be such a doctrine as irresistible grace. In other words, some influence *greater* than our natures—*greater* than our resistance—must be brought to bear upon our souls, or else we are forever doomed, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (*1 Cor 2:14*).

(5) Perseverance of the Saints. And now, to the final point—the perseverance of the saints. Again, for the sake of summary, let us refer to the *Baptist Confession*, which agrees on this point with the other historic confessions of faith:

Those whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance... (*Chapter 17, Article 1*)

Again, let us show that this is exactly what the Scriptures teach. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son...Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?...for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life...nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom 8:29ff*).

And again, let us recognize the fact that all that the men at the synod of Dort, and those who teach likewise, were doing, was putting into small compass in a systematic form, the teaching of God's gospel of *free* and *sovereign grace*. If man cannot save himself, then God must save him. If all are not saved, then God has not saved all. If Christ has made satisfaction for sins, then, it is for the sins of those who are saved. If God intends to reveal this salvation in Christ to the hearts of those whom he has chosen to save, then God will provide the means of effectually doing so. If, therefore, having ordained to save, died to save, and called to salvation those who could never save themselves, he will also preserve those saved ones unto eternal life for his own glory.

Thus following total depravity, and unconditional election, and limited atonement, and effectual calling, we have—*the perseverance of the saints*. "He that hath begun a good work in you *will perform it* until the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil 1:6*). The Word of God is replete with references to this blessed truth. "And this is the Father's will, that of all he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (*John 6:39*). "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and *they shall never perish*, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (*John 10:28*). "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (*Rom 5:10*). "There is therefore now *no condemnation* to them that are in Christ Jesus" (*Rom 8:1*).

This is the believers hallmark, that he belongs to Christ; that he is persevering in the things of Christ; that he is "giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure" (*2 Peter 1:10*). The believer in Christ may fall into temptation, but the Lord will "not suffer him to be tempted above that which he is able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape" (*1 Cor 10:13*), so that the believer comes forth, and goes forth again in the things pertaining to his salvation to the glory of Christ. Those matchless verses of Romans 8:28-39 show the Divine logic in God's eternal salvation; the logic that Calvinism simply states. The salvation that had its beginning in God's mind and purpose must end in the fulfillment of his unthwartable purpose that those "whom he did foreknow" are eternally united with their Saviour.

Conclusion. This, then, in very broad outline, is the teaching that is sometimes called Calvinism. Far from being an innovation of man, it is the doctrine of the Word of God clearly formulated and set forth.

The perennial question, however, is sure to be raised: "But does not this Calvinism hinder the work of the gospel?" The most casual glance at the history of the Church of Jesus Christ in this world is sufficient to invalidate such an opinion. The gospel of Christ has flourished most where and when the Lord's people have held these *doctrines of grace* close to their hearts. We think of the zeal of **William Carey** that drove him from his shoemaker's shop to evangelize India for Christ. Carey was a solid Calvinist, as also was **Andrew Fuller**,

another great Baptist who helped form the *Baptist Missionary Society*. Consider these words of the godly **David Brainerd**, the man who believed that the Red Indians of America as well as the white man had souls: "I then had two desires," he writes in his journal, "mine own sanctification, and the ingathering of God's elect." One of the greatest evangelists of modern times was the Calvinistic **George Whitefield**, yet his Calvinism never hindered his preaching the gospel of Christ: "With what divine pathos," it was said of him, "did he exhort the sinner to turn to Christ."

Calvinism, if we can use that word and not be misunderstood, was the gospel of **Robert Murray M'Cheyne**, as it was of **Andrew Bonar**, and **William Burns**, that great leader of revival and missionary to China. Martyrs, Reformers, leaders of Christ's Church on earth, when they tell of the gospel that they preached and died for, tell out the gospel of God's saving grace to his own elect flock. How could one begin to list them? Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, Latimer, Knox, Wishart, Perkins, Rutherford, Bunyan, Owen, Charnock, Goodwin, Flavel, Watson, are but a few of God's noble army of witnesses to the truth of *sovereign grace*. Was any of their work for the Lord hindered by what they believed? And what did they believe? They believed that God was **The Sovereign Lord**. They dared to believe that they worshipped and served a King who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Well did that prince of preachers, **Charles Spurgeon**, put it when he said, "I have known men bite their lip and grind their teeth in rage when I have been preaching the sovereignty of God...the doctrinaires of today will allow a God, but he must not be a King." Did Spurgeon's belief in *sovereign grace* hinder the gospel? And yet, how many rose up in strife against him on account of the doctrines he preached! "We are cried down as hypers," he could say, "scarcely a minister looks on us or speaks favourably of us; because we hold strong views upon the divine sovereignty of God, and his divine electings and special love towards his people."

Perhaps a word from that same giant of the Church should set a closing exhortation before us to lay firm hold upon these blessed truths of God's Word and tell them forth to the praise of his glorious Name:

The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth, I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel; that which thundered through Scotland, must thunder through England again.

—Adapted from the writings of W. J. Seaton