

## Intellectual Calvinism

On October 31, 1517, a poor emaciated German monk named Martin Luther, puzzled and grieved over the abuses and sale of indulgences in the Roman Catholic Church, affixed to the doors of the castle-church at Wittenberg, ninety-five Latin Theses on the subject. The Theses were very mild in tone, contained no objection to any Church doctrine or Popish practice whatever, and objected, not to the indulgences and their sales, but only to their abuse. Nevertheless, they set off a chain of events that has caused the date of their public exposure to be called the birthday of the Protestant Reformation, the great turning point of Christian History.

In less than three years in which controversy over the Theses was fanned into a raging inferno (in which Luther forged his doctrine of Justification by Faith), the Pope had been sufficiently provoked into issuing a Bull of Excommunication against Luther and his followers. This Bull, issued June 15, 1520, which would have had the Protestants condemned and burned as heretics, was instead burned by Luther on December 10, 1520. Thus Luther broke forever with Rome, and the Protestant Reformation became history.

Ulrich Zwingli was born January 1, 1484, seven weeks after Luther, at the small village of Wilhaus in Northeastern Switzerland. He was ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of Constance. His ensuing fame as a preacher and patriot earned him a call to the position of chief pastor of Grossmunster, the principal church in Zurich, which was to become the Wittenburg of Switzerland. He was greatly influenced by Luther and the Reformation in Germany, and became the leader of the Reformation in Switzerland.

Twenty-five years younger than Luther and Zwingli, Frenchman John Calvin became the theologian of the Reformation and responsible for the conservation of the labors of all the other reformers. Consequently, the system of theology that was formulated in the Reformation has subsequently been nicknamed Calvinism. It is, however, nothing less than a return to Scripture-centered theology after 1400 years of steadily increasing apostasy. A more reasonable and intelligent designation is Reformed Theology.

Grateful as we are for the Reformation, it stopped far short of a true return to Evangelical Christianity. This may be understood and even excused when we consider that the reformers were first generation Papists when they were converted and had no higher shoulders on which to stand than the immoral and corrupt pagan contemporaries with which they lived. Tradition had taken deep roots in them before they saw divine light. True, they had the same Bible which we now have, but pre-taught concepts can seriously obscure truth. Also, we may well consider that the people to whom they ministered were not prepared to go any further than they did at the time. Some of the areas in which the Reformation faltered are as follows:

### The Priesthood

A higher than scripturally warranted view of the ordained clergy was retained by the Reformers. The biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers, which was still held by small sects as the Anabaptists, was still rejected. Some denominations holding Reformed Theology still retain these concepts of priests.

### High Church Liturgy

Prescribed prayers, ceremonies, forms, etc., practiced by the Roman church were, to a degree, simply revised and imposed upon the Protestants. Liberty and freedom of expression in worship was still prohibited, or discouraged. This still persists in some Reformed Churches.

### Sacraments

The Reformers never agreed on how far to break with Romish theology on the Sacraments. It seems amazing to us now that they could not simply throw them all out and rest, as they taught, their hopes of justification in the once-for-all substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ. Luther departed from the Mass only slightly with his doctrine of Consubstantiation. He clung to the belief that Christ was in some way present in the communion elements, and violently opposed from these ideas among his contemporary reformers. Infant baptism was retained by all the reformers, although Zwingli admitted it had not scriptural basis, and would have abandoned it in favor of believer's baptism, except that it would have identified him with the hated Anabaptists. Calvin declared that without doubt the primitive Church practiced baptism only by immersion, yet continued the practice of sprinkling.

### Church and State

The Reformers were never able to separate Church and State. To them, the Kingdom of God extended literally to civil powers. Calvin demonstrated this by his rule over the city of Geneva.

The moral character of the Reformers is sometimes attacked with varying degrees of justification. Luther was an intemperate beer drinker. Zwingli was accused of immoral conduct with females, a charge which he defended only by disclaiming to have ever defiled a married woman, a virgin or a nun. (Such conduct was common among priests at that time.) After he married, however, his record of behaviour is beyond reproach. Calvin's record is spotted only by the burning of Servetus, whom he considered an heretic. Although it is disclaimed that Calvin actually ordered his execution, he had power to prevent it and did not.

Because of the above and other reasons, the Reformation was largely incomplete and never became truly evangelical. Later such men as Bunyan, Knox, Whitfield, Edwards and Spurgeon were to take the soteriology of the Reformation and apply it in a real evangelical sense.

The thing of great value that we inherited from the Reformation was its sound and unshakable recovery of Biblical Soteriology, salvation by grace plus nothing. Once again the great theme of redemption that threads itself all through both the Old and New Testaments was sounded from the pulpit. Salvation is of the Lord. Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, saves!

This soteriology was challenged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by a Dutch theologian named James Arminius. His followers systematized his theology and submitted it to the Church of Holland in 1610 as the “Remonstrance.” But it was rejected as unscriptural by the Synod of Dort in 1619; and in the place of the Five Points of Arminianism a refutation was formulated which came to be known as the Five Points of Calvinism, or more recently termed, “The Doctrines of Grace.” Following this article an arrangement by Dr. Lorraine Boettner gives these contrasting views in summary.

Historically, the following denominations have followed Arminian theology: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Nazarene, Wesleyan, Holiness, Campbellites (Christian and Church of Christ), Adventist, and practically all Pentecostal bodies. On the other hand, the following denominations have their roots in Calvinistic soteriology: Anglican (Episcopal), Presbyterian, all Reformed denominations, Congregational, Lutheran and Baptist.

The religious roots in this country were planted by Calvinistic Puritans. For several decades they operated the only schools in the country. New England’s universities are a monument to their pioneering work; and though these schools have long ago become apostate, yet they had their beginnings in sound Christian principles. The largest seminary in the world, Southern Baptists’ Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was founded by B. H. Carroll, who was a confirmed Calvinist in soteriology. He believed in the absolute sovereignty of God in all things.

But everything decays and declines. So have our concepts of God and salvation in all denominations. So today we see that practically all denominations have become practical, if not outright, Arminians. A few still cling precariously to a corrupted version of the fifth point, Eternal Security. This is now stated in a feeble and vulnerable fashion as “once saved, always saved,” suggesting that if man can manage to get in, the God will obligingly lock the door so that he cannot get out again. But these are still Arminians, because Arminians never took a positive stand on this point. A form of Eternal Security is permissible within the Arminian system.

Thus it was with no little joy that many of us began to note a remarkable interest in recent years, in recovering the doctrines of grace. Puritan literature once again began to appear on the bookshelves. Churches began to spring up, preaching the doctrines of grace. Some radio preachers began to dare once again to herald the gospel of God’s Salvation. Sovereign Grace movements began to form “fellowships” and Sovereign Grace Bible Conferences began to spring up with Sovereign Grace journals and periodicals appearing here and there.

Hearts that had become sick of Revivalism, spurious man-centered evangelism; that had seen the futility of Prophetic polemics, were turned off by the subjectivism of the Charismatic Movement, and conditioned by the Faith-Rest principles of Keswick, began to find hearty, soul-satisfying substance in the Living Bread that is revealed is a Sovereign Christ. Here was a theology that was soundly consistent with the Scripture in all points, coincided exactly with true experience in grace, which gave all the glory to God and stripped man of all his pretensions of vainglory.

I dare say that there are few men living today who have been more instrumental in pointing more people to Sovereign Grace than I have. And doubtlessly, I will continue to do so. But the fruits have left somewhat to be desired. A spirit that is not the spirit of Christ creeps in and corrupts the truth. Over and over, I must go back and pull into focus truths and concepts that all too consistently become lopsided. Especially I am concerned that these multitudes who are coming to embrace the doctrines of grace do not become ensnared in some of these present day “Sovereign Grace Movements.”

On closer inspection, these Movements are somewhat less than the key to real spiritual revival that we expected them to be. While we must be grateful for instrumentality which they have served in disseminating truth, we cannot but observe some fatal defects which have rendered the Movements *per se* as another dead-end street. I am going to list some of them here; and although this certainly does not characterize all personalities and churches in the Movement, it is a dark cloud that hangs over the whole thing. May the Lord see fit to life it.

### **Intellectual Pride**

This bears an odor strikingly similar to the stench of the “spiritual Pride” among Neo-Pentecostals. Because the Reformers were astute scholars, and the finest minds in Christian history have been among the writers and preachers of Calvinism, it is understandable that their followers would desire to emulate them. They are obsessed with being considered scholarly. Their language and fellowship is wracked with a painful apprehension lest they do, say, or write something that will not seem properly scholarly. I heartily amen A. N. Martin’s observation that “If your sermon is printable, it isn’t fit to preach to a popular audience.” There is a great tendency to challenge one another, to nit-pick. There is a fantasy identification with some of the former spiritual giants who lived in a time when theological issues were of great interest to the public and when newspapers and periodicals printed whole sermons of controversial content. While it is true that we must stand for truth and expose error, these men have their noses so buried in the past, they are not aware of the issues and the thinking of men in the masses today. They are answering questions no one has thought to ask, and would not even recognize it if stated. It is true that basic issues never change, but they do wear different garments and are stated in different language. In this, many are beating the air, building their own straw men and exhausting their energies fighting them.

### **Rejection of Supernatural Phenomena**

Puritan theology has a defect in that it simply does not allow for gifts and ministries of a supernatural nature. Perhaps this is an over reaction against Romish superstitions. A distinction was long ago fabricated between ordinary and extra-ordinary gifts and ministries, and this unscriptural definition has stuck like a leech to Reformed Theology, and robbed it of much spiritual life. It is shockingly inconsistent with the high place that divine inspiration of Scriptures holds in the system. We read some Puritan writer speaking of a demonized boy as the “epileptic boy.” Because of the insistence of Reformed people to stick their hands in their pockets

and cry repeatedly, “There is no such thing today,” they are poorly equipped to cope with the Charismatic crisis. They have a narrow spectrum of ministries and gifts, and in their minds will permit no more. Likely there will be none.

### **A Defeatist View of Sanctification**

Because of the first point of Calvinism, Total Depravity of man, the present day Movement insists upon a far more than warranted emphasis on the wickedness and corruption of the redeemed child of God. While the Bible clearly declares that there is no remedy for fallen Adam except death and resurrection in Christ, it does not so dwell on his continual corruption. There is a remedy, and that is the theme of the Scriptures. But the Movement views with extreme suspicion any claim to victory over the power and dominion of sin in the life of the believer. While this on one hand will drive some to despair and continual defeat, it leads some into antinomianism . . . lawlessness. “Since we must sin anyway, then let’s go ahead. Grace is greater than our sin.” Because of this, many “Sovereign Grace” churches are wracked through with sin and worldliness. How can we expect revival in such a state and attitude? We praise God that some imminent Calvinists, such as D. M. Lloyd-Jones, have soundly refuted this grievous fault and are attempting to bring the Movement to a more balanced view of Christian victory.

### **Isolationism**

Light is to shine in the dark. Salt is to be sprinkled and intermingled with all the meat. But the members of this Movement withdraw themselves into a restricted fellowship of those who believe everything they do and refuse to fellowship with others whom they openly confess to be Christian, but who do not agree with them. A hyper-critical sectarian spirit pervades their conferences. (I thank Thee that we are not as other men, Arminian, Semi-Pelagian, Hyper-Calvinist, Supra-Lapsarian, etc.) The late Arthur Pink, whose writings have blessed millions, refused to have anything to do with the revival in the Hebrides, although he was ministering and residing in the immediate area. He fought it tooth and nail because it did not quite fit his preconceived mold. How tragic! Lines of fellowship must be drawn, of course, but not through the unrent body of the Lord.

### **No Heart and Urgency in Preaching**

This is a charge generally reserved for Hyper-Calvinists, the followers of the theology of John Gill, who are anti-missionary. But it is a practical weakness in the movement that calls itself Evangelical Calvinism. Obviously, if we are going to be constantly occupied with debate and strife, with trying to be scholarly and approved of men, we are not going to have much heart left to yearn for the souls of men, to identify with their weaknesses and afflictions. And though we may say that we do with our mouths, the note of urgency is missing; in the place of tender compassion is an intolerant lashing out with cold facts. The letter still kills, no matter how correct and pure it is. Without the Spirit, it can minister no life. The Holy Spirit rests upon the broken and bleeding Lamb, not the haughty, arrogant scholar.

### **God is Not at Its Center**

How could such horrid defects take over a movement which stands for such pure Biblical truth? How can the Faith of the Fathers come to be the creed of such a barren wasteland? Simply this. With all its speaking about God, God is not at the center. God is only there because of the purpose He serves in the system. The system of theology has become an idolatrous substitute for God. B. B. Warfield profoundly and simply stated, “A Calvinist is someone who has seen God.” Too many have not seen God, but a system of theology. The proper order is revelation of the Almighty God: then right theology about Him must follow. But the reverse does not always hold true. Too few of this generation have seen God. I can see this flaw in many to whom I have ministered. They joyfully and excitedly embrace the doctrines of grace, but have not yet seen God. I fear many are yet unconverted. Without a personal revelation of the God of truth, the truth of God can simply become another hateful idol and a grievous stumbling block to true spirituality.

Once again, I want to reiterate that these indictments in no way apply to all men in the Movement. I praise God for many who have a proper revelation of God in all His glory and are working diligently to bring balance and a practical New Testament Evangelism to the Movement. It is futile, however, to view this movement as a real revival. It must be regarded as the preceding four (Prophecy, Revivalism, Keswick, and Neo-Pentecostalism): a stumbling block and a poor substitute. We do not need another 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. We need a 20<sup>th</sup> century reformation and a first century Revival. We must continue to call upon God to bring again Zion.

- C. M.

## Arminianism or Calvinism?

The following material from *Roman: An Interpretative Outline*, by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, contrasts the Five Points of Arminianism with the Five Points of Calvinism in the clearest and most precise form we have found anywhere. It is also found in their smaller book, *The Five Points of Calvinism*. Both books are published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley, NJ (1963). Messrs. Steele and Thomas have served for several years as co-pastors of a Southern Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

### The “Five Points” of Arminianism

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#### 1. *Free Will or Human Ability*

Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man’s freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man’s freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power either to cooperate with God’s Spirit and be regenerated or to resist God’s grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man’s act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner’s gift to God; it is man’s contribution to salvation.

#### 2. *Conditional Election*

God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the Gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man’s will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner’s choice of Christ, not God’s choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

#### 3. *Universal Redemption or General Atonement*

Christ’s redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone’s sins. Christ’s redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

#### 4. *The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted*

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the Gospel invitation; He does all that He can to

bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit’s call. The Spirit cannot

### The “Five Points” of Calvinism

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#### 1. *Total Inability or Total Depravity*

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the Gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is sinful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore he will not – indeed he cannot – choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently it takes much more than the Spirit’s assistance to bring a sinner to Christ – it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God’s gift of salvation – it is God’s gift to the sinner, not the sinner’s gift to God.

#### 2. *Unconditional Election*

God’s choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His Own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God’s choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God’s choice of the sinner, not the sinner’s choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

#### 3. *Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement*

Christ’s redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ’s redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation.

#### 4. *The Efficacious Call of the Spirit or Irresistible Grace*

In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the Gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to Regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

### 5. *Falling From Grace*

Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc.

All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ – that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

#### *According to Arminianism:*

Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond) – man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the critical point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

#### REJECTED

By the Synod of Dort

This was the system of thought contained in the "Remonstrance" (though the "five points" were not originally arranged in this order). It was submitted by the Arminians to the Church of Holland in 1610 for adoption but was rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1619 on the ground that it was unscriptural.

all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation to man's will, nor is he dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

### 5. *Perseverance of the Saints*

All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.

#### *According to Calvinism:*

Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the Gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

#### REAFFIRMED

By the Synod of Dort

This system of theology was reaffirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as the doctrine of salvation contained in the Holy Scriptures. The system was at that time formulated into "five points" (in answer to the five points submitted by the Arminians) and has ever since been known as "the five points of Calvinism."