

The Doctrines of Grace

Ephesians 1:3-10

Ephesians 1:3-10 (NASB)

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

PREFACE

There is scarcely another word that arouses such suspicion, mistrust, and even animosity among professing Christians as the word 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 which is not according to knowledge. The following teachings are written in the hope that much of the abuse that is hurled at the Calvinistic system of theology will be withdrawn, and that the truth of that great teaching, which was the backbone of our fathers in the faith, and the strength of the church in a far more glorious era than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.

Introduction

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, however, and they presented their five points in the form of a Remonstrance — or protest — to the Dutch Parliament.

The Five Points of Arminianism were, broadly speaking, as follows:

1. Free will, or human ability.

This taught that man, although affected by the Fall, was not totally incapable of choosing spiritual good, and was able to exercise faith in God in order to receive the gospel and thus bring himself into possession of salvation.

2. Conditional election.

This taught that God laid His hands upon those individuals who, He knew - or 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 — which was, of course, according to the first point of Arminianism, not completely fallen anyway.

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. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration limited by the human will.

This taught that the Holy Spirit, as He began to work 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 from grace.

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 the Scriptures. 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 put 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 are sometimes set forth in the form of an acrostic on the word “**TULIP**”, as follows:

T Total Depravity (i.e. Total Inability)

U Unconditional Election

L Limited Atonement (i.e. Particular Redemption)

I Irresistible Calling

P Perseverance of the Saints

As can be readily seen, these set themselves in complete opposition to the **Five Points of Arminianism**. Man is totally unable to save himself on account of the Fall in the Garden of Eden being a *total* 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 persevere to eternal joy.

These are the so-called Five Points of Calvinism.

We shall now proceed to examine them in more detail, firmly based as they are upon the Word of God, and held tenaciously by our forbears in **“the faith once delivered to the saints.”** For that faith we are to contend earnestly. We shall see the truth of what **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** meant when he declared, **“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

As we come to consider the first of the five main points of Calvinism, surely the thing that should impress us is the fact that this system begins with something that must be fundamental in the matter of salvation, and that is, a correct assessment of the *condition* of the one who is to be saved.

If we have deficient and light views about sin, then we are liable to have defective views regarding the means necessary for the salvation of the sinner. If we believe that the fall of man in the Garden of Eden was merely partial, then we shall most likely be satisfied with a salvation that is attributable, partly to man, and partly to God.

How full of common sense are the words of **J. C. Ryle** on this subject! **“There are very few errors and false doctrines,”** he says, **“of which the beginning may not be traced up to unsound views about the corruption of human nature. Wrong views of a disease will always bring with them wrong views of a remedy. Wrong views of the corruption of human nature will always carry with them wrong views of the grand antidote and cure of that corruption.”**

Fully aware that this was the case, the theologians of the Reformation and those who formulated the Reformed teaching into these **Five Points at the Synod of Dort**, basing their findings firmly on the Scriptures, pronounced that man’s natural state is a state of *total depravity* and therefore, there was a total inability on the part of man to gain, or contribute to, his own salvation.

When Calvinists speak of *total depravity*, however, they do not mean that every man is as evil as he could possibly be, nor that man is unable to recognize the will of God;

(nor yet, that he is unable to do any good towards his fellow man) or even give outward allegiance to the worship of God.

What they do mean is that 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 the faculties — the will, the understanding, the affections and all else.

We believe this to be irrefutably taught by the Word of God to which we now refer. The following are merely a selection of the Scriptures that confirm the Calvinistic teaching of *total depravity*.

The Bible teaches with absolute clarity that man, by nature, is **DEAD**:

Romans 5:12 (NASB)

¹² **Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**

It tells us that men are **BOUND**:

2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NASB)

²⁵ **with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,**
²⁶ **and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.**

It shows us that men are **BLIND AND DEAF**:

Mark 4:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹ **And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,**
¹² **so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."**

It shows us that we are **UNINSTRUCTABLE**:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ **But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**

The Bible speaks of us as being **NATURALLY SINFUL**:

[i] *By Birth*:

Psalms 51:5 (NASB)

⁵ **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.**

[ii] *By Practice:*

Genesis 6:5 (NASB)

⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

This then, is man's *natural state*.

We must ask, then:

- 1) Can the **DEAD** raise themselves?
- 2) Can the **BOUND** free themselves?
- 3) Can the **BLIND** give themselves sight, or the **DEAF** hearing?
- 4) Can the **SLAVES** redeem themselves?
- 5) Can the **UNINSTRUCTABLE** teach themselves?
- 6) Can the **NATURALLY SINFUL** change themselves?

Surely not I

Job 14:4 (NASB)

⁴ Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!

Jeremiah 13:23 (NASB)

²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.*

- 7) Could the Word of God show more plainly than it does that the *depravity is total*?
- 8) And that our inability to desire or procure salvation *is also total*?

The picture is one of death — spiritual death. We are like Lazarus in his tomb; we are bound hand and foot; corruption has taken hold upon us. Just as there was no glimmer of life in the dead body of 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;

Ephesians 2:1 (NASB)

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

Salvation, by its very nature, must be “**of the Lord.**”