

[Click Here to  
Buy it Now](#)



Westminster  
Bookstore

# THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN

CROSSWAY BOOKS  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*The Doctrines of Grace*

Original edition copyright © 2002 by Linda McNamara Boice and Philip Graham Ryken

Published by Crossway Books  
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers  
1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Chris Tobias

First printing, trade paper, 2009

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Scripture references marked RSV are from the *Revised Standard Version*.

Copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Scripture references marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

ISBN: 978-1-4335-1128-8

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0946-9

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0947-6

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Boice, James Montgomery, 1938–2000

The doctrines of grace : rediscovering the evangelical gospel  
/ James Montgomery Boice, Philip Graham Ryken.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 13: 978-1-58134-299-4

ISBN 10: 1-58134-299-3 (HC : alk. paper)

1. Calvinism. 2. Grace (Theology) I. Ryken, Philip Graham, 1966–

II. Title.

BX9422.3 B65 2002

230'.42—dc21

2001007701

---

VP	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09		
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

# Foreword



I have often wondered how my ministry would change if I were to hear a prognosis from my physician that I had a terminal disease and only months or weeks left to live. Would I retire from active ministry to care solely for my own needs? Would I try to continue ministry with a renewed sense of urgency? Would my messages be more bold?

I don't know the answers to these questions. But I do know what Jim Boice did when the above scenario became real to him. From the day he learned he was dying of cancer to his actual demise, the span of time was a mere six weeks. Forty-two days. The last two of those weeks he was bedridden and extremely weak. While the virulent disease was sapping his strength daily, Dr. Boice called upon a reservoir of strength in his own soul, a strength quickened and sustained by the grace of God, to continue writing hymns and this present volume. He did not live long enough to see this work completed but was encouraged by the assurance that his colleague Dr. Philip Ryken would complete it for him.

As familiar as I am with Jim Boice's style and content, on a first reading I could not detect where Jim's writing ended and Phil's began. Of one thing I was sure: Jim did not write the last chapter. Yet in an earlier draft of chapter 2, in the midst of a treatment of Abraham Kuyper, reference was made to Kuyper's famous Stone Lectures at Princeton University in 1898. This reference was followed by the comment: "We shall return to the subject of these lectures in our final chapter." When I read this comment I wondered to whom the "we" and "our" referred. Was the plural used as a result of editing that occurred after Dr. Boice's death, indicating the joint project with Dr. Ryken? Or was this merely a case of Dr. Boice employing the editorial "we"? In the event, it was not God's will for Jim to pen the chapter promised.

It is no surprise to me that this final work from Jim Boice, who wrote literally scores of books over the course of his ministry, should

focus on the doctrines of grace. Here was a man who not only believed in the doctrines of grace but also loved those doctrines and had fire in his bones about propagating them. I knew Jim Boice for more than thirty years and never saw that fire diminish. His soul was held captive by the doctrines of grace. His ministry was an ongoing doxology to the doctrines of grace because they so clearly manifest the God of that grace.

In this book Drs. Boice and Ryken not only provide a lucid and compelling exposition of the doctrines of grace but also provide a historical framework for their development. The book traces the historical impact of these biblical truths. It also makes bare the sad state of affairs that afflicts the church when these doctrines are denied or neglected.

In our day there remain many who still confess their belief in the doctrines of grace in particular and Reformed theology in general. Indeed, I think there are more academic institutions in America today that embrace Reformed theology than at any time in our nation's history. However, there are few that have a zeal and passion to propagate that faith.

James Montgomery Boice was not merely an adherent of Reformed theology or an admirer of the magisterial Reformers; he was himself a Reformer. His ministry at Tenth Presbyterian Church; the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology; his writing ministry; his care for the inner city of Philadelphia; his statesmanship as a national Christian leader—all of these expressions of service flowed out of his love for the Reformed faith.

It is not surprising that the last literary work of James Boice would focus on his first love, the doctrines of grace. This work is not simply a tribute to Dr. Boice and his ministry—it is, at its core, a tribute to the grace of God, to whom belongs all the glory for our redemption. As Dr. Boice now enjoys the felicity of his eternal rest, we are left to work for the recovery of the Reformed faith in our time.

R. C. Sproul  
Lent, 2001  
Orlando, Florida

# Preface



James Boice liked to finish what he started, so it is not surprising that in his final months he was working to complete two major projects. One was a book of *Hymns for a Modern Reformation*. The other was the present volume—a biblical, theological, historical, and practical presentation of the doctrines of grace.

When it became apparent that Dr. Boice would be unable to complete either of these projects himself, he entrusted them to colleagues on the staff of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church. Dr. Paul Jones had written the music for the hymns, so it was natural for him to prepare the hymnal for publication. Then, during our last staff meeting together at the church before his death in June of 2000, Dr. Boice asked me to finish writing *The Doctrines of Grace*.

Fortunately, the volume was already half written. Not only had Dr. Boice prepared a complete outline for the book and determined the thesis for each chapter, but he had also written a full draft of the five chapters on the Five Points of Calvinism. These chapters form the middle section of the book (chapters 3 through 7). Here my only contributions have been some light stylistic editing and several small additions that integrate this section with the rest of the book.

Dr. Boice and I only had time for one brief discussion about the chapters that remained to be written. However, I was delighted to discover that for each of these chapters he had left behind notes containing ideas that he wanted to emphasize, quotations he hoped to use, books he intended to consult, and so forth. I have used as much of this material as possible, incorporating it into the overall flow of the book.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the doctrines of grace. The sections entitled "The Doctrines of Grace," "The Five Points of Arminianism," and "The Five Points of Calvinism," are partly adapted

from material Dr. Boice prepared for the New Members class at Tenth Church. As indicated in the text itself, “Today’s False Gospel” is a summary of his argument in *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* which was published by Crossway in 2001.

The main thesis of chapter 2 is the one that Dr. Boice wanted to advance, namely, that Calvinism is good for the church, and that its abandonment generally leads to liberalism. Also, the examples given are the ones that he intended to use: Calvin, Edwards, and Kuyper. In keeping with a suggestion I made to him in an earlier conversation, I have added a section on the Puritans. The closing analysis of current trends in evangelical theology is entirely my own, although I believe it is thoroughly consonant with Dr. Boice’s views.

In some ways chapter 8 is the most important chapter in the book. James Boice wanted to portray the kind of Christianity that, in my view, he so ably represented: biblically based, theologically rigorous Calvinism that is also practically minded and kindly hearted. In accordance with the notes that were left for me, the chapter’s basic outline comes from Al Martin’s booklet *The Practical Implications of Calvinism*. I have done my best to convey what Dr. Boice so earnestly wanted to convey: the warmth and vitality of true Reformed spirituality.

The notes for chapter 9 were less extensive. Dr. Boice planned to draw from Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism*, but it was left for me to develop the implications of Reformed theology for church and culture. However, the final appeal to make a personal response to the doctrines of grace comes from Dr. Boice himself.

Readers will find that this is a polemical book. By this I mean that it argues for a theological position—Calvinism as set over against Arminianism. It is our conviction that evangelicalism is in desperate need of the best kind of Calvinism. It was Dr. Boice’s intention for this book to mount a vigorous defense of Reformed theology while at the same time maintaining the highest standards of Christian charity. This has also been my intention. Readers will have to judge for themselves how well we have succeeded, which leads me to emphasize that while I wish to give my late colleague full acknowledgment for his part in writing this book, I also accept full responsibility for all of its shortcomings.

Many friends helped to complete this project. Randall Grossman, Michael Horton, Mark Noll, Richard Phillips, Jonathan Rockey, Leland Ryken, and R. C. Sproul reviewed the manuscript and made helpful suggestions for its improvement. Dr. Boice's personal assistant, Mary Beth McGreevy, made corrections for style, and Patricia Russell helped prepare the indexes. I am grateful to the session of Tenth Presbyterian Church for allowing sufficient study time to complete the book during the month prior to my installation as senior minister. I also thank Greg and Mary Berzinsky for providing a place for me to work free from distraction. Finally, here I express publicly what I communicated to James Montgomery Boice privately: thanksgiving to God for the extraordinary privilege of sharing with him in the preaching ministry of Tenth Church and of joining him in the defense of biblical orthodoxy.

Earlier I mentioned that Dr. Boice wrote *Hymns for a Modern Reformation*. Appropriate stanzas from these hymns appear at the beginning of each chapter. The complete hymns have been published by Tenth Presbyterian Church; hymnals and recordings may be ordered through the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals at [www.AllianceNet.org](http://www.AllianceNet.org).

Philip Graham Ryken  
Memorial Day, 2001  
Philadelphia

O N E



# Why Evangelicalism Needs Calvinism

*How marvelous, how wise, how great,  
How infinite to contemplate:  
Jehovah's saving plan.  
He saw me in my lost estate  
Yet purposed to regenerate  
This faithless, fallen man.*

**T**he world should realize with increased clearness that Evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism.”<sup>1</sup> The great Princeton theologian Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield wrote those words a century ago. At the time, Calvinism still had a major influence on evangelicalism, helping to define its theology, shape its spirituality, and clarify its mission. That is no longer as true as it once was. Increasingly Calvinism is defined over against evangelicalism, and while many Calvinists still consider themselves evangelicals, most evangelicals are suspicious of Calvinism.

On a first reading, therefore, Warfield's claim seems excessive, and probably false. One doubts whether it would find widespread acceptance in the contemporary church. What has Calvinism to do with evangelicalism? And why would the vitality of the evangelical church in any way depend on Calvinist theology?

As surprising as it may seem, Warfield's claim is the thesis of this

book, namely, that evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism. To put this in a slightly less provocative way, evangelicalism needs Calvinism. In order to see why this is so, it helps to remove the labels. By “Evangelicalism,” Warfield essentially meant what German Lutherans meant when they first started using the term during the Protestant Reformation: a church founded on the gospel, the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when Warfield spoke of “Calvinism,” he was referring to the Protestant Reformation, with its insistence on justification by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. To put it more simply, evangelicalism stands for the gospel and Calvinism stands for grace. What Warfield was really saying, therefore, is something that every Christian should and must believe: the gospel stands or falls by grace. As Warfield recognized, the gospel is not really the gospel unless it is a gospel of *grace*; in other words, the gospel is only good news if it announces what *God* has done to save sinners. And if that is true, then the gospel stands or falls with the doctrines of grace.

## THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

The doctrines of grace—these words are shorthand for five distinct Bible teachings that were linked together in response to the theology that developed in Holland in the late sixteenth century. This theology was associated with the name of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609). Arminius and his followers stressed the free and therefore self-determining will of man, which led them by a logical process to deny John Calvin’s (1509–1564) doctrine of strict predestination, and especially the teaching that Jesus died only for the elect, those whom God had chosen. The Synod of Dort (1618–1619) was called to respond to the theological deviations of the Arminians, and from it came *The Canons of the Synod of Dort*, containing the classical summation of the five doctrines of grace known today as TULIP, or “The Five Points of Calvinism.”

TULIP is an acrostic, the letters of which stand for the doctrines that were most in dispute: *Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the*

saints. These are not the wisest or the most accurate ways of speaking about these doctrines; however, they are the most common way, and the acronym is a convenient handle for remembering them. These doctrines are important because they take confidence away from any spiritual good that might be thought to reside in man and instead anchor it in the will and power of God alone.

Although these doctrines constitute the purest expression of Calvinism, Calvin did not invent them, nor were they characteristic of his thought alone during the Reformation period. These truths are contained in the Old Testament Psalms. They were taught by Jesus, even to his enemies, as recorded in John 6 and 10 and elsewhere. The apostle Paul confirmed them in his letters to the Romans, the Ephesians, and others. Saint Augustine argued for the same truths over against the denials of Pelagius. Martin Luther was in many ways a Calvinist (as, in important respects, Calvin was a Lutheran). So were Ulrich Zwingli and William Tyndale. For this reason, it is perhaps more accurate to describe this theology as “Reformational” rather than “Calvinist.” The Puritans were Reformed theologians, too, and it was through their teaching that England and Scotland experienced some of the greatest and most pervasive national revivals the world has ever seen. Among these Puritans were the heirs of the Scottish Reformer John Knox: Thomas Cartwright, Richard Sibbes, John Owen, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, Thomas Boston, and many others. In America many thousands were influenced by Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, and George Whitefield, all of whom were Calvinists.

In more recent times the modern missionary movement received its direction and initial impetus from those in the Reformed tradition. The list of these pioneers includes such great missionaries as William Carey, John Ryland, Henry Martyn, Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, John G. Paton, and John R. Mott. For all of these men, the doctrines of grace were not merely an appendage to Christian thought; rather, these were the central doctrines that fueled their evangelistic fires and gave form to their preaching of the gospel.

In short, the doctrines known as Calvinism did not emerge late in church history, but find their origins in the teaching of Jesus, which has been preserved throughout the church in many periods, and

which has always been characteristic of the church at its greatest periods of faith and expansion. It follows from this that the evangelical church will again see great days when these truths are widely and fearlessly proclaimed. If that is true, then nothing is more needed today than a recovery of precisely these doctrines: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints (or, as they are identified in this book, radical depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption, efficacious grace, and persevering grace). These gracious doctrines have been prominent in the minds and hearts of God's people in some of the church's finest hours.

### TODAY'S FALSE GOSPEL

Sadly, this is not the church's finest hour. We live in an age of weak theology and casual Christian conduct. Our knowledge is insufficient, our worship is irreverent, and our lives are immoral. Even the evangelical church has succumbed to the spirit of this age. *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*<sup>2</sup>—the book that serves as a prologue to the present volume—argued that the evangelical movement has lost its grip on the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the simplest way to say this is that evangelicalism has become *worldly*. This can be demonstrated by comparing it with yesterday's liberalism. What was once said of liberal churches must now be said of evangelical churches: they seek the world's wisdom, believe the world's theology, follow the world's agenda, and adopt the world's methods. According to the standards of worldly *wisdom*, the Bible is unable to meet the demands of life in these postmodern times. By itself, God's Word is insufficient to win people to Christ, promote spiritual growth, provide practical guidance, or transform society. So churches supplement the plain teaching of Scripture with entertainment, group therapy, political activism, signs and wonders—anything that promises to appeal to religious consumers. According to the world's *theology*, sin is merely a dysfunction and salvation means having better self-esteem. When this theology comes to church, it replaces difficult but essential doctrines like the propitiation of God's wrath

with practical techniques for self-improvement. The world's *agenda* is personal happiness, so the gospel is presented as a plan for individual fulfillment rather than as a pathway of costly discipleship. The world's *methods* for accomplishing this self-centered agenda are necessarily pragmatic, so evangelical churches are willing to try whatever seems like it might work. This worldliness has produced the “new pragmatism” of evangelicalism.

Another way to explain what is wrong with the evangelical church is to identify major ideas in contemporary thought, and then see whether they have made any inroads into the church. *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* identified six major cultural trends: secularism, humanism, relativism, materialism, pragmatism, and anti-intellectualism or “mindlessness.” *Secularism* is the view that the universe is all there is; God and eternity are excluded. *Humanism* is the belief that—in the words of the ancient pagan philosophers—“Man is the measure of all things.” This inevitably leads to the worship of self. *Relativism* teaches that because there is no God, there are no absolutes; truth is relative. *Materialism* is closely related to secularism. If nothing exists except the here-and-now, then the meaning of life can be found only in personal possessions. *Pragmatism* measures truth by its practical utility. What is right and true is whatever works. *Mindlessness* is the overall “dumbing down” of popular culture, the shrinking of the American mind, which television has done a great deal to accelerate. Most people have short attention spans, especially when it comes to discussing anything worthwhile or important. In the lyrics of one popular entertainer, “I’m not aware of too many things.”

These are some of the prevailing trends in American culture at the dawn of the new millennium. If the church has become worldly, then we would expect to find these same attitudes in evangelical churches. And of course that is exactly what we do find. As surprising as it may sound, evangelicalism has become increasingly secular. In an effort to make newcomers feel comfortable, pastors teach as little theology as possible. Worship has become a form of popular entertainment rather than transcendent praise. New church buildings are designed to look more like office parks than houses of worship. All of these trends contribute to the secularization of what once was sacred.

At the same time, evangelical churches have become much more humanistic. This is inevitable: the less we talk about God, the more we talk about ourselves. Sermon content is determined more by the intended audience than by the sacred Scripture. This quickly leads to relativism in thought and conduct. Moral convictions are no longer determined by careful argument on the basis of biblical absolutes; they are uninformed choices based on personal feelings. The church is also materialistic. The evangelical attitude toward money is captured in the title of a book recently edited by Larry Eskridge and Mark Noll: *More Money, More Ministry*.<sup>3</sup> When financial prosperity becomes a significant priority, churches find themselves forced to figure out what works. This quest both derives from and results in the new pragmatism mentioned earlier. Most pastors want their churches to be bigger and better, but even if they are not better, it would be better if they were bigger! Not surprisingly, their parishioners want to be healthier and wealthier, too. Behind all these worldly attitudes there lurks a pervasive mindlessness, an unwillingness to think very seriously about anything, but especially Christian doctrine. Evangelicalism has become a religion of feeling rather than of thinking.

So when we ask the question, “Whatever happened to the gospel of grace?” the answer turns out to be that many evangelical churches have exchanged godliness for worldliness. This happens in too many ways to count, but “The Cambridge Declaration” includes a helpful summary: “As evangelical faith has become secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.”<sup>4</sup> What happened to the grace of the gospel? It was lost in the church study, when the minister decided to give his people what they wanted rather than what they needed. It was lost in the Christian bookstore, somewhere between the self-help section and the aisle full of Jesus merchandise. And it was lost in our minds and hearts when we decided to accept the world’s theology of human achievement, saving room for our own personal contribution to salvation.

What has replaced the gospel of grace is a message that is partially biblical but ultimately self-centered. Like everything else in creation, the human soul abhors a vacuum. When something essential disappears from our theology and our spirituality, something else rushes in to replace it. When God himself disappears, what replaces him is the self. To quote again from “The Cambridge Declaration,” “Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of the fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world—from the self-esteem gospel to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works.”

One place to observe this misplaced confidence in human ability is in the area of Christian witness, where a self-centered gospel has produced a self-absorbed evangelism. When evangelicals think of evangelism, rather than thinking first of the gospel message they are prone to think of a particular response to that message. This perhaps explains why testimonies of saving faith tend to emphasize personal experience rather than the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, as J. I. Packer warned in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, there is an inherent danger in defining evangelism “in terms of an effect achieved in the lives of others; which amounts to saying that the essence of evangelizing is producing converts.”<sup>5</sup> Such an approach inevitably turns evangelism into another form of pragmatism. However, the essence of evangelism does not lie in the results; it rests in the message itself—the good news of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that the gospel message does not demand a response. Of course it does. But that response is not the work of the evangelist; it is the work of God, and this is most clearly understood when the presentation of the gospel is grounded in the doctrines of grace.

It is sometimes thought that the Five Points of Calvinism tend to dull one’s passion for sharing the gospel. This view is mistaken, both in its understanding of Calvinism and in its understanding of evangelism. The truth is exactly the opposite, namely, that the doctrines of grace establish the most solid foundation and provide the most endur-

ing motivation for the most effective proclamation of the gospel. As we shall see, only thoroughly biblical convictions about divine election, particular redemption, and irresistible grace give confidence that the gospel has the power actually to accomplish God's saving purpose.

One of the brightest examples of better evangelism through Calvinism was the nineteenth-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon was one of the greatest evangelists England has ever seen, as well as one of the country's staunchest defenders of the doctrines of grace. He wrote:

I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and him crucified unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the Gospel and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the Gospel . . . unless we preach the sovereignty of God in his dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the Gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of his elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend the Gospel which allows saints to fall away after they are called.<sup>6</sup>

If Spurgeon was right, then Warfield was right, too: evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism. Or to restate our thesis, the doctrines of grace preserve the gospel of grace.

### THE FIVE POINTS OF ARMINIANISM

The heart of this book is an exposition of the doctrines of grace from Holy Scripture. But before giving a thorough biblical defense of these doctrines, it may prove useful to offer a brief overview summarizing the theological issues at stake whenever we consider God's grace in the gospel.

Although the doctrines of grace have been taught throughout the history of the church, the so-called Five Points of Calvinism were developed in response to the theology of Jacob Arminius. Arminius taught systematic theology at the University of Leyden. In 1610, the

year after the professor died, his followers drew up five articles of faith that summarized his understanding of salvation. The Arminians, as they came to be called, presented these doctrines to the state of Holland in the form of a protest (or Remonstrance), arguing that the Dutch confessions should be amended to conform to their views. Here are the five planks of their theological platform:

*Article I:* That God, by an eternal unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end. . . .

*Article II:* That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer. . . .

*Article III:* That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good. . . .

*Article IV:* That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and co-operative grace can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible. . . .

*Article V:* That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations. . . . But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds.<sup>7</sup>

These articles may be summarized as follows: "I. God elects or reprobates on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief. II. Christ died for all men and for every man, although only believers are saved. III. Man is so depraved that divine grace is necessary unto faith or any good deed. IV. This grace may be resisted. V. Whether all who are truly regenerate will certainly persevere in the faith is a point which needs further investigation."<sup>8</sup>

What these statements hold in common is an uncertainty about, and in some places a resistance to, God's absolute sovereignty in grace. At the heart of the Arminian position lies the insistence that divine sovereignty must somehow be accommodated to human capability. Election and reprobation are not divine decrees; they are based on human choices. The efficacy of the atonement does not rest on Christ's saving work alone but also on the sinner's faith and repentance. Although God's grace is attractive and persuasive, it is not powerful enough to triumph over those who stubbornly resist his love. And whether or not a Christian will persevere to the very end is open to question, because perseverance ultimately depends on the Christian rather than on Christ. Although these are distinct doctrinal issues, they are linked by a common concern to downplay predestination so as to allow human beings to determine their own spiritual destiny.

The Arminian Remonstrance produced a storm of theological

controversy, culminating in the Synod of Dort, an international conference on Reformed doctrine. As the delegates met over the course of seven months, their debates served to clarify the Arminian position. Despite some reassurances to the contrary, the Reformed delegates eventually concluded that Arminianism could not avoid the following theological implications:

1. *Human ability.* Human nature has been damaged by the Fall, but not totally disabled. Even if we are not basically good, at least we are not completely bad. The will is not enslaved to sin, but is capable of believing in Christ, even prior to regeneration (although not entirely apart from God's grace). Thus every sinner retains the ability to choose for or against God, either cooperating with God's Spirit unto salvation or resisting God's grace unto damnation.

2. *Conditional election.* God's choice to save certain individuals was based on foreseen faith, on his ability to know in advance that they would freely believe the gospel. Election is conditional in that it is ultimately determined by individual choice: the only people God has chosen are those whom he already knew would believe. Furthermore, the faith that he foresees is not exclusively a divine gift but partly a human decision. Therefore, the ultimate cause of salvation is not God's choice of the sinner but the sinner's choice of God.

3. *Indefinite atonement.* Christ's work on the Cross makes salvation possible for everyone but not actual for anyone in particular. Although the crucifixion enabled God to grant forgiveness, this is given only on the condition of personal faith. Christ died for each and every person; however, only those who believe will be saved. Thus the atonement only becomes effective if and when someone chooses to accept it.

4. *Resistible grace.* Everyone who hears the gospel is called to faith in Christ, not only outwardly but also inwardly. The Spirit speaks to every heart, doing everything he can to persuade the sinner to trust in Christ. However, sinners are able to resist the Holy Spirit, and they will not be regenerated unless and until they repent. To put this another

way, the Spirit's application of Christ's saving work is contingent on the sinner's prior acceptance of the gospel. The Holy Spirit cannot impart new spiritual life unless the sinner is willing to receive it.

5. *Defectible grace*. Those who believe in Christ and are truly saved nevertheless can fully and finally lose their salvation by falling away from their faith. Eternal life is not secure when a sinner comes to Christ, but depends on the Christian's faithfulness to Christ until death.

There are different versions of Arminian theology, and not all Arminians would agree with all five of the preceding doctrines, at least as they are described here. However, the previous summary expresses what many evangelicals believe today. And what all five of these doctrines share is the insistence that the sovereignty of God's grace must in some way be limited by the freedom of human choice. Regeneration, election, atonement, glorification: the efficacy of these central acts of salvation does not depend on God alone but also on the cooperation of fallen sinners. In their study of *The Five Points of Calvinism*, David Steele and Curtis Thomas conclude that for the Arminian, "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 crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus *man*, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation."<sup>9</sup>

This helps explain why Arminian theologies are so prevalent in contemporary evangelicalism. For Arminianism, human decision making holds a central place in salvation. This results in a theology that is not exclusively God-centered but is distorted in the direction of the self. And of course this is what the spirit of the age demands. In these postmodern and increasingly post-Christian times, people are clamoring for attention. They are looking for spiritual experiences that are secularized, humanized, and relativized. Arminianism supplies

exactly what today's evangelicalism demands: a gospel that preserves a determinative role for personal choice.

## THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

By contrast, Calvinism insists that salvation is by grace from beginning to end. Salvation is a gift, in every sense of the word—God's gift for undeserving sinners who cannot be redeemed apart from God's saving grace. The gift is given to those to whom God chooses to give it; and although it is *offered* to everyone, it is not *given* to everyone. When God does choose to grant this gift, however, he effectively places it in the hands of his child; and once it is received, it can never be lost, stolen, or damaged. Truly, it is the gift that keeps on giving!

These gracious principles were defined and defended in *The Canons of the Synod of Dort*. As mentioned previously, an international team of theologians met at Dort to consider the Arminian position. Their deliberations resulted in a series of carefully worded doctrinal propositions that represented a century of mature theological and practical reflection on the great truths of the Reformation. In short, the Synod concluded that the decrees of election and reprobation were based on God's sovereign choice rather than on foreseen faith or unbelief; that although Christ's death was sufficient for all, it was efficient only for the elect; that humanity was totally corrupted by the Fall, and thus unable to choose salvation prior to regeneration; that God's grace is effective to convert the unbeliever; and that God so preserves believers that they can never totally fall from grace. These five basic points can be organized as follows:

1. *Total depravity*. The words "total depravity" are not the best way of speaking about the doctrine of utterly pervasive sin, or man's inability in spiritual things, because they suggest that we are all as bad as we can be and that everyone is equally sinful. That is not true, of course. Some sin more than others and will suffer greater punishment in hell for their sins. As theologian John Gerstner used to say, we are not as bad as we could be, because in each of us there is infinite room for *depravement*!

Rather than signifying that the unregenerate person is wholly evil in everything he does, total depravity teaches that nothing he does is ever completely good. Sin has pervaded every part of our physical, mental, and emotional makeup so that there is nothing about us that remains untouched by sin. In the interests of accuracy, therefore, it is better to speak of *radical* depravity, comprehensive iniquity, or the pervasiveness of sin. Our motives are never entirely pure, and thus to one extent or another all our actions are corrupted by evil desires. This corruption invades every aspect of our being, so that nothing we are or do is completely free from sin.

In this sad and pervasively sinful state we have no inclination to seek God, and therefore *cannot* seek him or even respond to the gospel when it is presented to us. In our unregenerate state, we do not have free will so far as “believing on” or “receiving” Jesus Christ as Savior is concerned. In fact, such is our slavery to sin that we cannot understand our need of Christ until God first gives us spiritual understanding. Even faith must come as a gift, because prior to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit our depravity renders us impotent to cooperate with God’s saving grace.

2. *Unconditional election.* If the condition of the human race is as bad as the biblical doctrine of depravity indicates, then salvation must originate with God. It must be a work of the triune God, accomplished and applied by him without any assistance on our part. Since we are never going to seek him, he is going to have to reach out to us and save us (if, in fact, we are to be saved). And this is what God does. The first step in this reaching out is God’s determination to do it, which is what the word *election* refers to. It means that what happens in an individual’s salvation is determined by the prior decision of God, who established the decrees of salvation in Christ before the world began. “Unconditional” indicates that this decision is made apart from anything God might foresee in the sinful creature. If election were based on anything that the sinner might be or do, then ultimately salvation would depend on human merit. But in order to prove that salvation is all of grace, election is a loving act of God’s sovereign will. Faith in Christ is not the cause of election but one of its results.

3. *Limited atonement.* Of the five doctrines summarized by the TULIP acrostic, the most difficult for most people to understand and accept is limited atonement. Part of the problem is the terminology itself, because here the words really are misleading. “Limited” atonement suggests that somehow the death of Christ did not do all that it could do or ought to do, that it was ineffective in some way. That is not what the doctrine of limited atonement is meant to affirm, however. What Reformed people want to say by these words is that the atonement had a specific object in view, namely, the salvation of those whom the Father had given the Son before the foundation of the world, and that it was effective in saving those persons. Thus it would be better to call this doctrine *definite* atonement, or particular redemption.

Particular redemption signifies that the death of Christ has saving efficacy for the elect, and for the elect only. Christ made satisfaction for sin when he died on the Cross, offering himself as the perfect substitute for God’s chosen people. Therefore, according to the plan of salvation, Christ’s death atoned for the sins of the elect but not for the sins of those who never come to him in faith.

4. *Irresistible grace.* Somehow the benefits of the atonement must be applied to the elect. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose inward operation enables sinners to repent and believe in Christ. In addition to the outward call of the gospel, made to everyone, the Holy Spirit issues an inward call. This inward calling is made only to the elect and inevitably draws them to faith in Christ. Because God is sovereign in their salvation, it is not possible for them permanently or effectively to reject this effectual calling. God’s grace is irresistible and invincible; the Spirit never fails to accomplish his saving purpose in the mind, the heart, and the will of God’s chosen people. This is how the Westminster Confession of Faith describes the Spirit’s gracious, efficacious work: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving

unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace” (Chap. 10, Sec. 1).

5. *The perseverance of the saints.* Sometimes this doctrine is called the doctrine of “eternal security.” It has two parts: 1) that God perseveres with his people, and 2) that because God perseveres with his people, they also persevere. The saints are simply the people of God, those whom God considers holy through the work of his Son. The perseverance of the saints really is the *preservation* of the saints, for their perseverance depends on God’s preserving grace. It is the faithfulness of Christ, rather than the faithfulness of the Christian, that brings the saints to glory.

Each of these five doctrines makes a unique contribution to our understanding of God’s grace. Each can be analyzed separately and also defended separately, as we shall see. However, these five doctrines are logically and theologically interrelated. They all serve to emphasize the grace of God in salvation. Warfield wrote,

Now these Five Points form an organic unity, a single body of truth. They are based on two presuppositions that Scripture abundantly supports. The first presupposition is the complete impotence of man, and the second is God’s absolute sovereignty in grace. Everything else follows. The meeting place of these two foundation truths is the heart of the Gospel, for it follows that if man is totally depraved, the grace of God in saving him must of necessity be sovereign. Otherwise, man will inevitably refuse it in his depravity, and will remain unredeemed.”<sup>10</sup>

The doctrines of grace stand or fall together, and together they point to one central truth: salvation is all of grace because it is all of God; and because it is all of God, it is all for his glory.

To fully appreciate the glory of God in the doctrines of grace, it helps to recognize the role of each person of the Trinity in the Five

Points of Calvinism. Election is the choice of God the Father. The atonement is the sacrifice of God the Son. The grace that draws us to Christ and enables us to persevere to the very end is the work of God the Holy Spirit. Thus salvation is all God's work from beginning to end—the coordinated work of the triune God—as it must be, if we are to be saved. Consider: if we are actually dead in our sins (radical depravity), then only God could choose us in Christ (unconditional election), only Christ could atone for our sins (particular redemption), and only the Spirit could draw us to Christ (efficacious grace) and preserve us in him (persevering grace). Therefore, all praise and glory belong to God alone: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!” (Rom. 11:36).

### TO GOD ALONE BE THE GLORY

Even this brief summary of the doctrines of grace is sufficient to reveal what is at stake in the conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism. Ultimately it is our view of God. Does he dispose everything—including everything that pertains to our salvation—for his own glory, or not? The starting point for any system of doctrine ought to be the greater glory of God. This is why, in and of themselves, the Five Points are not the heart of Calvinism; they simply serve to explain distinctive aspects of Reformed soteriology (i.e., the theology of salvation). However, all five points do *flow* from the heart of Calvinism, which is a passion for God's glory. Each doctrine draws attention away from what human beings can accomplish, in order to declare, “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9, KJV).

With its emphasis on the glory of God in salvation, Calvinism can help evangelicalism mature by restoring a proper view of God's majesty.<sup>11</sup> A large part of the problem in the church today is that our contemplation of God is not sufficiently or properly elevated. As Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware write in their book on divine sovereignty:

Ours is a culture in which the tendency is to exalt what is human and diminish what is divine. Even in evangelical circles, we find increasingly attractive a view of God in which

God is one of us, as it were, a partner in the unfolding drama of life. But lost in much of this contemporary evangelical theology is the full omniscience, omnipotence, splendor, greatness, supremacy, rulership, and unqualified lordship of God. In contrast, the vision of God affirmed in these pages [their book, *Still Sovereign*] is of One who reigns supreme over all, whose purposes are accomplished without fail, and who directs the course of human affairs, including the central drama of saving a people for the honor of his name, all with perfect holiness and matchless grace.<sup>12</sup>

This is one place where the doctrines of grace can help us, because together they show that God really does save sinners. We are dead in our sins, and therefore can do nothing to save ourselves, but together the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have done and will continue to do everything that is necessary for our salvation: choosing, redeeming, calling, and preserving. Thus the one point of Calvinism that the Five Points aim to demonstrate (and which Arminianism tends to deny) is that every aspect of salvation is the absolutely gracious work of the totally sovereign God. To him be the glory forever!

Having a high view of God means something more than giving glory to God, however; it means giving glory to God *alone*. This is the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. While the former declares that God alone saves sinners, the latter gives the impression that God enables sinners to have some part in saving themselves. Calvinism presents salvation as the work of the triune God—election by the Father, redemption in the Son, calling by the Spirit. Furthermore, each of these saving acts is directed toward the elect, thereby infallibly securing their salvation. By contrast, Arminianism views salvation as something that God makes possible but that man makes actual. This is because the saving acts of God are directed toward *different* persons: the Son's redemption is for humanity in general; the Spirit's calling is only for those who hear the gospel; narrower still, the Father's election is only for those who believe the gospel. Yet in none of these cases (redemption, calling, or election) does God *actually* secure the salvation of even one single sinner!<sup>13</sup> The inevitable result is that rather than depending exclusively on divine

grace, salvation depends partly on a human response. So although Arminianism is willing to give God the glory, when it comes to salvation, it is unwilling to give him *all* the glory. It divides the glory between heaven and earth, for if what ultimately makes the difference between being saved and being lost is man's ability to choose God, then to just that extent God is robbed of his glory. Yet God himself has said, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isa. 48:11).

Here many Arminians will wish to demur, protesting that they really *do* want to give God all the glory. And with good reason: every true Christian recoils at the thought of claiming any personal merit, and wants instead to give God all the praise. A striking illustration of this comes from an encounter between Charles Simeon and John Wesley. Simeon preached generally Calvinist doctrine at Cambridge. Wesley, of course, was a famous evangelist well known for his opposition to Calvinism. As Wesley indicates in his journal, the two men met on December 20, 1784. Simeon recorded their conversation, in which he began to question Wesley concerning his theology of salvation:

"Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions. . . . Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?"

"Yes," says [Wesley], "I do indeed."

"And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?"

"Yes, solely through Christ."

"But, Sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?"

"No, I must be saved by Christ from first to last."

"Allowing, then, that you were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?"

“No.”

“What, then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother’s arms?”

“Yes, altogether.”

“And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto His heavenly kingdom?”

“Yes, I have no hope but in Him.”

“Then, Sir, with your leave I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance: it is in substance all that I hold, and as I hold it; and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.”<sup>14</sup>

Wesley was hardly a Calvinist, but perhaps it may be said that he was a Calvinist at heart. He instinctively recognized the truth of a principle that he had not yet worked into his theology with complete consistency, namely, that sinners contribute nothing to their own salvation—it is God’s work from beginning to end. He knew that in order for the gospel to be a gospel of grace it must be all of grace.

Is there anything that we can contribute to our salvation? Only the sin from which we need to be saved, for we are the objects of divine grace. Yet the constant temptation is to slip the human element back into the equation. Theologians call this “synergism,” a term that comes from the Greek words *syn*, meaning “with,” and *ergos*, meaning “work.” In theology, synergism is the belief that we work together with God to accomplish and apply our salvation. But this is fatal to any sound doctrine of salvation, for it has the inevitable result of increasing the place of man and thus diminishing the glory of God in salvation.

To prove this point, Arthur Custance rehearsed Martin Luther’s debate with his friend and protégé Philip Melanchthon. Especially in his later years, Melanchthon argued that even if a sinner cannot contribute anything positive to his salvation, at least he does not resist God’s grace when it comes. This “non-resistance” may seem

like a very small contribution, certainly too small to make much difference. However, Luther warned that this “very little” was actually more dangerous than the “very much” that the Pelagians demanded when they argued that man was wholly capable of meriting God’s grace. What made it dangerous was its subtlety. After all, what was the harm in adding just a little bit of human effort to the work of God? But Luther recognized that this was tantamount to the error of Roman Catholicism, which insisted that the will of man is the decisive factor in salvation. He also recognized that the leaven of synergism eventually works its way through the entire loaf of soteriology.

What was at issue then—and what remains at issue today—was the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*, by grace alone. To add anything at all to God’s grace is to destroy its graciousness, its very nature as a gift. This leads Custance to conclude,

The difference between a monergistic and a synergistic faith, between a *God only* and a *God and* Gospel, is nothing less than the difference between the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the one hand, and all other religious systems of belief . . . on the other. There are basically only two alternatives. If man contributes any essential part towards his salvation, he effectively becomes his own savior. . . .

There is here a clear point of demarcation. It is all of God or it is not good news at all. If man is free to resist, God is not free to act, for He is bound by man’s freedom. If God is to be free to act, man must be bound by the will of God. . . . But in a fallen world, God’s grace must be irresistible or man’s will can remain forever opposed to God, and the will of the creature overrides the will of the Creator.

In truth there is no “Gospel” that is not entirely rooted in the sovereignty of God’s grace in salvation, which is the sum and substance of Calvinism. . . . The crucial issue is the sovereignty of God’s grace. . . .

The only defense against Synergism is an unqualified Calvinism ascribing all the glory to God by insisting upon the total spiritual impotence of man, an Election based solely upon the good pleasure of God, an Atonement intended only

for the elect though sufficient for all men, a grace that can neither be resisted nor earned, and a security for the believer that is as permanent as God Himself.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the only defense against a doctrine of salvation that exalts humanity—and thus the only hope for evangelicalism—is a thoroughgoing Calvinism. To receive the grace of the gospel as God's grace, we must recover the doctrines of grace.