

The Five Points of Calvinism - What are they and are they Biblical?

Romans 9

(The following is the substance of an address given by David Silversides at an after-church meeting at Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church on 31st January 1999.)

In dealing with this subject, our concern is not to exalt the name of a mere man, godly and great though John Calvin no doubt was by the grace of God, but it is to set forth those biblical doctrines that have become associated with his name, not at his desire or behest but after his time these doctrines became known as Calvinism. We want to set forth these doctrines because they glorify the great name of God and his Son Jesus Christ.

1. The History of the Five Points of Calvinism.

Where did this term, the five points of Calvinism, actually come from? At the time of the Protestant Reformation, not only did the Protestant Reformers by the grace of God rediscover the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone but they also rediscovered the biblical teaching of divine predestination: the predestination of sinners to salvation by God from eternity.

This doctrine had been taught by others here and there since the apostles' time, particularly Augustine believed in absolute predestination, but by and large this doctrine

had been woefully neglected by the professing church as a whole. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, William Farel, Huldrych Zwingli and Theodore Beza, all these Protestant Reformers and many more believed and taught the doctrine of absolute predestination, but as Calvin was undoubtedly the most able theologian of the Reformation, this doctrine became particularly associated with his name.

This teaching was later embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith in the middle of the 1600s and was the standard teaching of the Puritans and of the Covenanters in Scotland, and of Presbyterians in general within the British Isles. This doctrine was also incorporated into the doctrinal creeds of the Dutch Church. The rough equivalent in the Dutch churches were documents known as the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. These were their subordinate standards of what they believed to be the teaching of the word of God.

A man called Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch professor, opposed the doctrine of predestination. Arminius opposed the doctrine of John Calvin and his followers became known as Arminians. Arminius himself died in 1609 but in 1610, just a year later, some of his followers drew up a remonstrance, a kind of protest in which they remonstrated with the state of Holland opposing the doctrine of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism and seeking that these documents be amended so that the official creed of the churches of Holland should favour Arminian doctrine. This remonstrance contained five points, the five points of

Arminianism. These were roughly as follows: first, that God elects on the basis of foreseeing faith; secondly, that Christ died for all and every individual though only believers are actually saved; thirdly, that man's sin makes God's grace necessary in order to believe; and fourthly, that nevertheless this grace can be effectively resisted and frustrated; and then fifthly, that whether true Christians will certainly always persevere in the faith is doubtful. Later on they explicitly denied the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and believed that true Christians could fall from grace and totally apostatize and be lost.

A national synod was called in 1618 to meet at Dort in Holland. As well as the Dutch delegates to this synod, there were also men from Germany, Switzerland and England. This synod, largely ministers but also other men too, lasted seven months. They not only rejected the five points of Arminianism but drew up what became known as the Canons of Dort which contained five main points in direct opposition to Arminianism. These became known as the five points of Calvinism. To help us remember, we can sum up these five points under the word TULIP: T for total depravity; U for unconditional election; L for limited atonement; I for irresistible grace; and P for perseverance of the saints. This is a handy summary but it must be borne in mind that the fundamental point that the synod of Dort was concerned to establish in opposing Arminianism and in asserting the five points of Calvinism, comes down to one point, that salvation is all of God.

2. The Biblical Basis of the Five Points of Calvinism.

(1.) Total Depravity.

This is sometimes called total inability. What does it mean, total depravity or total inability? The Arminians taught that man was only partially depraved and not totally spiritually helpless. At this point, Arminianism teaches more or less the same as Roman Catholicism. Like Roman Catholicism, they taught that man has in him still some natural inclination to turn towards God and that all he needs is the assistance of the Holy Spirit given to all who hear the Gospel and thereafter when the Holy Spirit has done what he can, the sinner may or may not exercise his individual free will and belief. On this view, faith causes the new birth. Although the Holy Spirit convicts and gives some assistance, it is man independently, with an independent free will who believes and having believed, then the Holy Spirit regenerates and renews.

The Calvinists taught the exact opposite. They taught that man is totally depraved; that though he may have an awareness of God and though he has a conscience, he has no natural ability to turn to God and no natural ability or inclination to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They taught that the will of man is in bondage to sin and that though men do what they want, (in that sense they are free,) yet without a sovereign work of regeneration by the Spirit, men will always want to sin and will never want to trust the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6, paragraph 4, "From this original corruption, whereby we

are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions." They did not deny that God restrains the sin of man in various ways, but without the sovereign regeneration of the Spirit, men have no natural inclination to turn from sin to God and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. On this view, regeneration or the new birth by the Spirit of God is the cause of faith, not the result of it. The Calvinist believes that the Spirit of God regenerates and that is the cause of a particular sinner believing. The Arminian believes that men independently of God believe and then they are regenerated. For the Calvinist, it is the other way around, regeneration by the Spirit is the cause of a particular sinner believing.

What is the biblical teaching? Let us consider a few verses. Romans 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." So the carnal mind unrenewed by the Spirit is enmity against God.

In Romans 7:18, the word 'flesh' is used by the Apostle Paul of man as a sinner unchanged by the saving grace of God. It is man as he is apart from salvation. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Colossians 1:21, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled."

Genesis 6:5, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

These passages, and they are only a selection, show that the heart of fallen man is quite incapable of turning from sin to God, "that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," John 3:19. So if sinners are converted, it is not due to any superior use of some supposed natural goodness or independent free will within them. The question, of course, is not whether whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely, Revelation 22:17 says that. The question is not whether all who want Christ are commanded to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. The question is not whether whosoever will may come. It is why some are willing and others are not willing. The fact is that when the Gospel is preached, some believe, some do not believe. Why is that? Who makes the difference? Is it some superiority in those who believe, that they are better people and so they make the right choice? The Calvinist in line with the word of God emphatically says, "No, it is not." All men are naturally utterly opposed and at enmity to the living and true God

and naturally hostile to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – total depravity.

(2.) Unconditional Election.

What is meant by this term? That God elects or chooses those who will be saved should be obvious to any reader of the Scriptures. Only if you avoid and ignore passages of Scripture can you avoid that fact. Ephesians 1, Romans 9, and so on speak quite clearly of God's election – that God elects and chooses the heirs of salvation.

The Arminians knew that, however, they reduced this concept to meaninglessness by holding that God chooses on the basis of foreseeing faith, that is, that he foresaw who would believe and then he chooses them. So God chooses on condition of foreseeing faith. This, of course, is no real divine choice at all. It is simply God's response to man's choice. Man is in the driving seat, God simply responds to independent autonomous man.

The Calvinists absolutely rejected the Arminian teaching. They taught that God's choice is unconditional, that it is not based on anything superior nor foreseeing faith in those who are chosen over against those who are not. God is free and chooses without reference to any merit or foreseen merit or foreseen faith in the sinner.

What is the biblical teaching? First of all, the Bible teaches that God controls everything. Ephesians 1:11 tells us that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Even the wicked actions of men fall out

according to his sovereign plan and purpose. So in Acts 2:23, "Him," that is Christ, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Why does God know the future? God foreknows because he foreordains. God knows the future because God determines the future, and so God is in control of everything, otherwise he is not God.

Secondly, election in Scripture is free and unconstrained. Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." This is not God waiting on man's independent will to be exercised, it is his will. He elects. He predestinates according to his will. He is in charge. There is no constraint upon the Almighty.

Romans 9:11, the reference is to Jacob and Esau, "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.)" So the apostle is saying here are these twins in the womb of Rebekah, before they are born, before they have done good or evil, God chose Jacob not Esau, and he says it is not on the basis of anything they have done. It is quite clear the apostle did not believe it was on the basis of something foreseen that they would do. God chose Jacob rather than Esau according to his free and unconstrained, sovereign, good pleasure.

So free is God that he can choose the foolish and the base for his own glory. 1 Corinthians 1:26, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." God in his sovereignty in order to show the freedom of his grace and to show the utter unmerited nature of his kindness, has deliberately chosen largely from among the base and the foolish and the weak, not entirely but largely, that no flesh should glory in his presence, that no one can say, "I was chosen because of something in me."

Thirdly, election is the cause of faith, not the reverse. 1 Thessalonians 1:4, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." How did he know they were elected? "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." He knew they were God's elect because when he preached the Gospel, they believed.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 makes it clearer still. See the contrast to those in verse 11 upon whom God sends strong delusion, "That they all might be damned who believed

not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." And then in verse 13, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now you see the order. From the beginning, in eternity, God chose them to salvation. Because they were chosen, in due time the work of the Spirit sanctified, that is, renewed their hearts and wills, so that they believed the truth and the Gospel was made known to them and they were now on the road to obtaining eternal glory. There is election in eternity then the work of the Spirit in time causing them to believe the truth.

Perhaps you object, "But this is not fair." The Apostle Paul anticipates that objection in Romans 9:18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." There he anticipates

someone saying, "It is not fair," and his answer is, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" God has as much right to elect and to reprobate as the potter has power over the clay to form of the same lump vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour." It all comes down to the rights of God. God does not have to deal identically with every individual otherwise mercy is not mercy. We deserve nothing but eternal damnation from God. Anything better is of the undeserved and unconstrained kindness of God.

God does not cause all men to hear the Gospel. True, the church is responsible to preach the Gospel to every creature but it is a fact that not everyone hears the Gospel. In the Old Testament, few outside of Israel heard the truth of God but even in the New Testament age, multitudes lived and died without hearing the Gospel. They die as transgressors of God's law and guilty before him. If God has to deal equally, uniformly with each individual sinner, does this mean, then, that those who do not hear the Gospel in this life will be given some opportunity of salvation in the next? If God has to deal the same with everyone, it would mean that. It comes down to this: shall we write our own Bible in pursuance of this proud allegation that God owes sinful man something even if only that he should treat everyone the same? He does not owe any sinner any good thing and he can do as he pleases and he does. He elects sovereignly and unconditionally.

(3.) Limited Atonement.

This is also sometimes called particular redemption. What does this mean? The Arminian view was that Christ died to save everybody but that only believers are actually saved. On this view, Christ tried to save everybody but partially fails. They say the atonement is unlimited in scope but obviously they believe that it is severely limited in effect. On the Arminian view, the atonement of Christ does not actually secure the salvation of anybody, it simply makes men saveable.

The Calvinists, on the other hand, held that Christ died specifically for the elect, for those chosen in eternity, in order to save them and only them and that his death, though limited in intended scope, is 100% successful. The Arminian believes Christ tried to save everybody but fails; the Calvinist believes Christ intended to save the elect and totally succeeds.

What is the biblical teaching? First of all, all men are not saved but if the Arminian view is right and Christ died for all the sins of all men, then they should be. It should be obvious. The Bible teaches that not all will be saved, there will be goats as well as sheep, and the goats will go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous unto life eternal. But if Christ had died for all the sins of all men, then why does anyone end up in hell? Does God punish the same sin twice? If Christ on the cross was bearing the punishment of all the sins of all men, then why are some of those sins for which he bore the punishment according to the Arminian, then punished in hell? God is just, he punishes sin fully but once only.

But then you say, "Ah, but the reason that some for whom Christ died to save end up in hell is because of their unbelief." But what is unbelief? It is a sin. If Christ died for all the sins of all men, then he died and atoned for the sin of unbelief in those who do not believe. So why do they end up in hell? Christ has borne the punishment for all their sins according to the Arminian, including their unbelief, and yet there is God punishing them in hell for those sins for which Christ made atonement. The idea is outrageous.

What about some of the passages used to defend a universal atonement? If they mean what the Arminian says they mean, they would prove not just universal atonement but universal salvation. For example, the word 'world' in 1 John 2:1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Propitiation means a bearing of wrath, a turning away of wrath. If the word 'world' here means not simply sinners from all nations as opposed to Israel only, but if it means every individual, then that would mean that Christ had actually turned away the wrath of God for every individual so that every individual is saved. But the Arminian does not believe that. However that is what the text would mean if the word 'world' meant 'every individual.' In fact, what it is saying is that sinners, Jews, Gentiles, people of all nations, all who will be saved from all over the world must be saved by him and no other way.

Or again in Romans 5:18, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." If the phrase 'all men' meant every individual rather than simply the elect whom Christ represents, then just as all represented by Adam came under condemnation, then every individual receives justification of life. In other words, the passage would not just teach that Christ atoned for everyone, it would teach that everyone was justified. However, when we look at the context, it is quite clear the parallel is between Adam who represents all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, and Christ who represents all the elect of God. All become sinners and under condemnation in Adam. Those whom Christ represents become righteous, justified because of his obedience.

The word 'all' is used in a relative sense. For example in John 11:48 when the Jewish leader said, "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him," they did not mean every single individual in the world. It was a general comparative term. In everyday speech, if someone comes out with some commonplace fact and we say, "Oh, everybody knows that," we do not mean every individual in the world, we mean that it is a matter of common knowledge.

Christ's redeeming work according to Scripture is a success. Galatians 1:3, "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our

Father." Christ gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us. He does it. His work is a success.

Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Christ will see the travail of his soul and he will be satisfied. We are not talking about an attempt that is only partially successful. We are not talking about a stab in the dark. He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

John 6:36, "But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Verse 39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." There are those who are given by the Father to the Son and the Son says they will come to him and they will be raised up at the last day. His redeeming work was not a haphazard, ramshackle, makeshift, uncertain, rickety affair. It was an actual work of redemption that succeeds in its intention.

Christ's redeeming work is specifically limited. Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." There Christ will definitely save his people. The outcome is not uncertain.

John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Then in verse 14, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of

mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." So there is a specific body of people, he calls them 'the sheep', and in verses 26 he says, "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." So he is saying, "I lay down my life for the sheep. You are not of the sheep because you believe not." So he is saying, "I lay down my life not for everybody but for the sheep."

Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." There the church is the object of God's redeeming work in Christ.

Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." Then in verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." There again Christ loved the church, he gave himself for the church.

Romans 8:33, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." He is saying because Christ died and rose again, it is certain that the elect of God will be justified.

Isaiah 53:8, "... for the transgression of my people was he stricken." There is a definite body of people, not a few

but a multitude which no man can number, for whom Christ died and whom he will certainly save.

Christ's intercession is limited in scope. John 17:9, "I pray for them," that is the disciples, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Then in verse 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Christ intercedes for believers in the present and those who would be believers in the future, the elect of God. Even on the Arminian view, if God foreknows who will believe, why should Christ die for those whom he knows will not believe? So Christ is a real, almighty and successful Saviour.

(4.) Irresistible Grace.

Irresistible grace or efficacious grace – what does it mean? The Arminians held and hold that when the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit works equally in all who hear, doing all that he can to bring about their conversion, but after he has done all within his power, it is left to the individual's independent and invincible free will as to whether he or she is converted or not. The Calvinists rejected this and taught that God's saving grace is irresistible. Not in the sense that it is not resisted but it is not effectively resisted. That is why they sometimes call it efficacious grace.

But what is the biblical teaching? First of all, God determines who are converted in his decree in eternity and by his action in time. Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added

to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts 13:48, "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Acts 16:14, Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened," so that she received "the things which were spoken of Paul." Acts 18:9-10, the Lord says to Paul, "... hold not thy peace: ... for I have much people in this city," that is many he was going to save.

1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The calling there is not the outward calling of the Gospel because that was true of the Jews who stumbled and the Greeks who said the Gospel was foolishness. It is talking about God's effectual call whereby he causes a sinner to believe.

1 Corinthians 3:4, "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." When Paul preached, when Apollos preached, the result proceeded from God.

All the biblical illustrative language indicates God's initiative. John 3:5-8, the Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ... Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth," or where it wills, "... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." He is

saying it is like the wind, we hear the sound of it, we see the effects but we cannot control it. The wind is beyond our control. We cannot summon the wind. So the Spirit of God is sovereign in renewing the heart of a sinner. He is not telling Nicodemus something he must do; he is telling Nicodemus something that he desperately needs and only God can do it, and he does it as he pleases.

John 6:65, "No man cometh to me except it were given him of my Father." In the next verse, some of the people went back, they were offended, but Christ is saying, "No man comes to me except it were given him of my Father." God can give or withhold the ability, the willingness to believe as he pleases.

2 Corinthians 5:17, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Quickened means made alive. You were dead, there was no life, no inclination to believe. Nothing. No spiritual life. Dead and God quickened, enlivened, brought them to life.

Repentance and faith are the gift of God. Acts 11:18, "Then hath God also granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life."

2 Timothy 2:24, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if

God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

2 Peter 1:1, "... you having received like precious faith." So repentance and faith are the gift of God.

Then we can say also that even the rejection of the Gospel is traced to the plan of God, because God has decreed who will be saved and he has decreed not to save others. Isaiah 6:9, "And he said," that is the Lord to Isaiah, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

In Matthew 11:25-26 we read, "At that time Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Romans 9 tells us, verse 18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Now whatever else that means, it means that God has determined who will believe and who will

not believe. In verse 22 we read, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

Then in 1 Peter 2:8, speaking of Christ as "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." They were disobedient. They did not do what they were commanded; they were responsible, but they were appointed to that disobedience.

Proverbs 16:4, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: even the wicked for the day of evil." If you are a Christian, do not pat yourself on the back. Thank God. The reason you believed when the Gospel was preached and that someone with you did not believe is to be traced to God in his sovereignty and in his grace, and if you are a Christian, you will thank God rather than congratulate yourself.

(5.) The Perseverance of the Saints.

The Arminians held that a true Christian can completely apostatize and end up in hell. The Calvinist believes that since God causes the elect to become Christians, he also keeps them persevering in the faith. Arminianism can give no more assurance of heaven than Rome. The Arminian who believes all the points of Arminianism can have no assurance whatsoever that he will end up in heaven. He may be sure that he is justified now but he

can have no certainty that he will be glorified in the world to come. On his deathbed he might apostatize and be damned. There is no more basis of assurance of salvation in Arminianism than when Luther was climbing the so-called Pilate's staircase in St. Peter's in Rome, trying to work out how he could ever know. Arminianism thoroughly believed, destroys assurance of salvation. Arminian salvation is no salvation, it is just a temporary possibility that we might get to heaven if, if we do not apostatize.

The biblical teaching is quite different. John 10:27-29, the Lord Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ... and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Romans 8:30 tells us, "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Those who are justified through faith in Christ in this world will certainly be glorified in that which is to come. So certain is it that it is put in the past tense. The future glorification of the Christian is as certain as his present acceptance with God.

Philippians 1:6, "Being persuaded of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Jude 1:24, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy..."

God causes people to believe; God causes believers to continue believing. "Work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Philippians 2:12-13.

If God is the cause of conversion, it will last. In the parable of the sower, the stony ground hearers in Matthew 13:20-21 professed for a while and fell away. The difference between them and the good ground hearers was there at the beginning below the surface. They looked like the real thing up top but below the surface there was no root, there was no genuine conversion from the start, so there was a temporary profession of faith. But real conversions are of God and real conversions last.

3. Why it Matters.

Firstly, only the biblical Calvinistic view is compatible with belief in an Almighty God. It is the only position that acknowledges God is really Almighty. Arminianism seeks to dethrone God, to say that God is helpless and frustrated, that he tries to save everybody but cannot. If God cannot control salvation, he is not in control of anything.

Secondly, only the biblical Calvinistic view asserts salvation is entirely of God. When we think of the religious spectrum, the pagan religions by and large tell men they must save themselves. Universalistic modernism, liberal Protestantism, regards salvation as unnecessary. Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation is partly of God and partly of man, it is a joint affair and

Arminianism does the same. It is true Arminianism ascribes more of salvation to God than Rome, but both Arminianism and Roman Catholicism ascribe part of salvation to man and part to God. There is still room for the Arminian to boast, "Why did I believe? Well, it is because I am better."

Biblical Calvinism alone says that God and God only saves, that salvation in all its aspects, in all its parts is of God. Only the Calvinist is consistently saying, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." And does not every real Christian, however confused in mind, desire to ascribe all of his salvation to God? If you are a Christian, do you not want to ascribe all your salvation to God? If you are a real Christian, you do, and you can only consistently do so by acknowledging these biblical doctrines known as the five points of Calvinism.

Thirdly, this doctrine exalts Christ as a real Saviour. He actually does save. The apostles never preached Christ as simply making men saveable. They never told the unconverted, "Christ died for you." In the sermons in the book of Acts, the apostles never felt any need or warrant to say to an unconverted sinner, "Christ died for you." Christ died for the elect and we do not know who they are. What the apostles did and what we should do is not preach human ability, not preach an impotent God. Preach human responsibility but not ability. Tell men they must repent and believe but tell them that they need a sovereign work of the Spirit or they will never be willing to do it. Christ did that. He taught unbelievers, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me

draw him." So the apostles never ascribed salvation in any part to man, only to Christ, the Prince and the Saviour who gives repentance unto his Israel.

Fourthly, Calvinism, or rather this biblical teaching, teaches a real but limited evangelistic responsibility. The Calvinist believes that the church is to preach to all men and women. The Calvinist believes that he is to preach that men are required to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the Gospel. (More on the free offer next time, God willing.) Whitefield, Spurgeon, M'Cheyne, were all Calvinists and they preached freely to all men.

The Calvinist believes that when he prays for the salvation of sinners, God can actually answer. Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Why was Paul praying that his Jewish countrymen would be saved? On the Arminian view, what is the point in praying to God? He cannot do anything about it. What are we asking God to do when we pray for the conversion of sinners? What we should be asking him to do is to do what only he can do, effectively renew the heart of a sinner, renew his will, make him willing in a day of his power so that he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Calvinist does not believe that it is his responsibility to secure professions of faith by invented evangelistic techniques. The Calvinist rejects entertainment evangelism because God has never told us to entertain

people so as to try and get them to hear the Gospel slipped in, as it were, somewhere in the program.

The Calvinist rejects the appeal system, that is, that system of telling sinners not that they must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ merely but that in order to do so, let them come to the front, let them sign a decision card and put their hand up etc. There is no biblical basis for any of that at all and it is deceitful. The Scriptures do not teach that people become Christians by signing a card or putting their hand up and it deceives people into thinking they are converted when they are not. You do not need a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit renewing the heart and will to walk to the front of a meeting, but you do need a sovereign work of the Spirit of God in order to be willing to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the appeal system as it is known, is not only not biblical but it implicitly contradicts biblical Calvinistic doctrine. It is an addition. It has no biblical basis. But also by equating conversion with some physical act which does not require a renewing work of the Spirit of God, a sovereign work of the Spirit, it is a denial of the necessity of the new birth as the cause of faith.

If people are truly converted under Arminian preaching, it is in spite of the Arminianism not because of it. It is God using what is true, that men must trust Christ crucified to be saved. If the appeal system was dropped, there would be not one single less genuine profession of faith; there would be a lot less false profession. I am not saying abandon preaching the Gospel, I am not saying abandon telling sinners they must repent and believe, I am talking

about the addition of the appeal system getting people to do something that is supposed to be equivalent to becoming a Christian. It is an unbiblical deception and it has not added one single genuine conversion to the church of God. If people are converted in that setting, it is in spite of the appeal system, not because of it.

So then, these things do matter. They matter immensely. The honour of God is at stake and the glory of his great name. Calvinism is true. Arminianism is false. The five points of Calvinism are true not because Calvin taught them but because they are in the word of God. Receive these doctrines in the love of the truth and ascribe honour and glory to God and to the Lamb. Amen.