

# THE SYNOD OF DORT

Many Reformed Churches around the world commemorate the Great Protestant Reformation which began in Germany on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517. On that providential day, Martin Luther nailed his famed 95 Theses on the door of the castle church of Wittenberg. In no time, without Luther's knowledge, this paper was copied, and reproduced in great numbers with the recently invented printing machine. It was then distributed throughout Europe. This paper was to be used by our Sovereign Lord to ignite the Reformation which saw the release of the true Church of Christ from the yoke and bondage of Rome. Almost five hundred years have gone by since then. Today, there are countless technically Protestant churches (i.e. can trace back to the Reformation in terms of historical links) around the world. But there are few which still remember the rich heritage of the Reformers. In fact, a great number of churches which claim to be Protestant have, in fact, gone back to Rome by way of doctrine and practice, and some even make it their business to oppose the Reformers and their heirs.

I am convinced that one of the chief reasons for this state of affair in the Protestant Church is a contemptuous attitude towards past creeds and confessions and the historical battles against heresies. When, for example, there are fundamentalistic defenders of the faith teaching in Bible Colleges, who have not so much as heard of the *Canons of Dort* or the Synod of Dort, but would lash out at hyper-Calvinism, then you know that something is seriously wrong within the camp. Yet, this is indeed what is happening. Most believers in the pews are not comfortable with theological jargon, not to mention detect the incursion of subtle errors into the church. But when ministers of the Gospel are also unconcerned about what errors have already been dealt with by church in the ages of learning in the past, then we know the floodgates of apostasy are being opened. And who knows how far the torrents will carry the church in the next generation? The attitude of preachers, we must remember, will inevitably rub off on the members of the church, some of whom may become leaders of the church by and by.

It is for this reason, I believe, we must go back to our past. We must remember the great work of God in and through the Church in the past and seek to learn from the mistakes of our forebears (cf. Dt 2:30; 3:3, Ps 105:5-6). It is especially pertinent for us to do so as we remember the Great Reformation.

Let us begin with a survey of the events leading up to the Synod of Dort. Following that, we shall briefly study the doctrine of the Canons according to the well-known order of the Five Points which developed from it. We shall, for good measure, expound and prove the proposition directly from the Scriptures rather than from the *Canons* (which we believe to be consistent with Scriptures). But we shall quote the *Canons* where appropriate to show the wisdom, foresight and biblical fidelity of the framers of the *Canons*.

## In Brief

The *Canons of Dort* was the product of a synod of Reformed Churches which met between the Nov 13, 1618 and May 6, 1619 in Dort (or Dordecht), Holland to examine the teachings of the disciples of a Jacobus Arminius, known as the Remonstrants. These had wanted their articles of faith to be adopted by the Churches in Holland, and so had petitioned the Dutch Parliament with a *Remonstrance* containing 5 points. The parliament called for the Synod, and the result was that the 5 articles of the *Remonstrance* were condemned. The Canons of Dort documented the findings of the synod. The full and revealing title of the document reads: "Judgement of the National Synod of the Reformed Churches of the United Netherlands: held in Dordrecht in the year 1618 and 1619; which was assisted by many excellent theologians of the Reformed Churches of Great Britain, the Electoral Palatinate, Hessa, Switzerland, Wetteraw, Geneva, Bremen, and Emden: Concerning the well-known five heads of doctrine, about which a difference arose in the Reformed Churches of the said United Netherlands."

In all 81 theologians (56 Dutch and 25 foreign) met for 154 sessions, and at the end of it condemned the five points of the *Remonstrance* as being contrary to Scripture and heretical. The Canons of Dort is essentially a systematic apology of the doctrine of salvation as taught by John Calvin. Though the document was officially adopted only Continental Reformed Churches that confess the *Three Forms of Unity* (which includes, the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*), the findings of the Synod was and is held in great esteem in Calvinistic Churches throughout the world. Indeed the essence of the *Canons*, as summarised in the 5 points of Calvinism or TULIP (the national flower of Holland!) is today still regarded as the yardstick of Calvinistic orthodoxy in most English speaking churches in the world.

## Jacobus Arminius

Jacobus Arminius (c. 1559-1609), also known as Jacob Haemensz, was born in Oudewater, Holland. Arminius was neither the originator of the doctrine espoused in the *Remonstrance*, nor was he author of the document, nor was he

the leader of the Remonstrants when they petitioned the Dutch Parliament. In fact, he died a year before the *Remonstrance* was penned and about ten years before the Synod of Dort was convened. Nevertheless, it is not without historical reasons why the doctrine refuted by the Synod is popularly known as Arminianism. Arminius was after all, the man who made the doctrine espoused by his students popular.

In 1576, at 17 years old, Arminius was enrolled as a theological student in the University of Leiden. Five years later, in 1581, he went to Geneva, and there studied under Theodore Beza, who had succeeded John Calvin as lecturer in theology. It appears, however, that Arminius was never really comfortable with Beza's doctrine of election and reprobation, though he did not show it.

Not long after his call to a pastorate in Amsterdam in 1587, Arminius was asked to refute a pamphlet written by a man by the name of Coornhert, criticising Calvin and Beza's doctrine of predestination. With personal discomfort and unresolved questions in his heart, it was not surprising that instead of being able to refute Coornhert objections, Arminius was won to his side. And soon, his theological biases began to surface in his sermons. As case in point was when he preached that Paul was referring to himself as an unconverted man in Romans 7:14-25. We need only to read the text to know the implication of his view, for it would make Paul able to desire to do good while unregenerated, which would mean that he was not radically depraved in his heart. Soon, Arminius began to be vigorously opposed by Plancius, one his fellow minister in Amsterdam.

Arminius was a popular man in the pulpit. And he was a brilliant scholar, refined in manners and appearance. Most importantly, he had many powerful friends in the government. At that time the universities were under state rather than church control. Thus, despite the controversy that was intensifying in Amsterdam as Arminius began preaching from Romans 9, he was appointed to the chair of theology at the Academy of Leyden.

At first, Arminius was opposed strongly by Franciscus Gomarus who was then a professor of theology at Leyden. But Arminius managed to persuade Gomarus of his orthodoxy by subtlety and craft, and Gomarus relented. Later Gomarus was to regret his decision, for as soon as Arminius was in the chair, then he began promoting his heresies to the students. In this way the doctrines of Arminius began to spread abroad, and soon the whole country was in turmoil and several conferences were called to settle the disputes.

Before anything could be settled, however, in October of 1609, Arminius died. His followers, however, continued to pursue their teacher's purpose. The following year, under the influence of a powerful court preacher, Janus Uytendogaert, the disciples of Arminius, gathered together in the city of Gouda to draw up the document which we know today as the *Remonstrance* or the *Remonstrantia*. By this document, the party hoped to have the parliament call for a revision (more like re-writing) of the existing confessions of the Dutch churches.

### **The Remonstrantia**

The *Remonstrance* was designed to subvert the established doctrine of the church. Therefore, it was written very craftily so as to give an impression that it is consistent with orthodoxy. In fact, many moderate Calvinists today who read this document today will have difficulty finding fault with it at all! Of course, in part, this is due to the ulterior care with which it was written, but I suspect, the lack of theological sensitivity that characterises much of the modern church is to be blamed too.

Those interested to examine the articles may find them in Dutch, Latin and English in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Baker, reprinted 1995), 3.545-49. We reproduce just the first two articles which most clearly show the Remonstrant's departure from orthodoxy:

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; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the gospel in John 3:36... and according to other passages of Scripture also.

Article II. That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior 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, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16 ... And in the First Epistle of John 2:2. ...

Are you able to detect the heresy? If not, you will find the other 3 articles even more subtle.

In the first article, the doctrine being proposed is that God's election and reprobation is based upon God's foreknowledge, i.e. those whom God foresaw will believe were elected, those He foresaw would reject the Gospel were reprobated. The Remonstrants very carefully avoided saying,-that election is therefore conditional, and that salvation is therefore not sovereignly brought about by God though it be by grace,-which is what they were teaching.

The second article, likewise, is essentially teaching that Christ did not die to save. Rather, He died for all without exception to make salvation possible; and whether a person is saved depends on his response to the Gospel!

In a nutshell, the other three articles teaches that man has ability to do good when *assisted* by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit's help may be resisted and a Christian may lose His salvation.

### **The Great Synod**

The Synod was convened in November, 1618; though it did not begin to deal with the Arminians until 6 December. In line with proper ecclesiastical procedures and the principle that accepted verities are to be regarded as truth unless proven otherwise, the Synod was appointed to examine and try the Arminians. Johannes Bogerman, the pastor of Leuwarden, a fiery and capable Contra-Remonstrant, was elected the president of the Synod.

The Arminians were naturally unhappy with this arrangement, and vehemently protested against the fact that their polemical opponents had been set over them as judges. From the onset, therefore, they tried to stall the proceedings. First, they attempted unsuccessfully to get Bogerman replaced. Then, rather than submitting themselves to the examination of the Synod and defending themselves doctrinally, they kept asking for more time to prepare their opinions. Not only that, they also tried to win the sympathy of the foreign delegates by depicting the national delegates as schismatics and persecutors of the innocent and simple.

It should be noted that though the national delegates were almost consistently Calvinistic, some of the foreign delegates were not so. The delegates from Bremen appeared to be totally in agreement with the Arminians. Also among the delegation of five from Great Britain, there were clearly those who leaned either to Arminian or Amyraldian (mid-way between Calvinism and Arminianism) positions.

By 14 January, 1619, when the Arminians again refused to submit to the authority of the Synod in the matter of their examination, Bogerman's patience ran out. He burst out:

The foreign delegates are now of the opinion that you are unworthy to appear before the Synod. You have refused to acknowledge her as your lawful judge and have maintained that she is your counter-party; you have done everything according to your own whim; you have despised the decisions of the Synod and of the Political Commissioners; you have refused to answer; you have unjustly interpreted the indictments. The Synod has treated you mildly; but you have - as one of the foreign delegates expressed it - 'begun and ended with lies.' With that eulogy we shall let you go. God shall preserve His Word and shall bless the Synod. In order that she be no longer obstructed, you are sent away! You are dismissed, get out!

With the departure of the Arminians, the Synod could finally get down to work. Though the former could no longer present their arguments personally, they were allowed to submit written defences of their position. This they did, and wrote rather voluminously. A committee was appointed by the Synod to consider these writings and to write a doctrinal consensus of the Synod together with rejection of errors. This was completed in about 3 months, and was signed by all the delegates.

### **Conclusion**

With the probable exception of the Westminster Assembly, the Synod of Dort was possibly the greatest assembly of notable Reformed scholars to have gathered to deliberate on any doctrinal issue. Some may question the nature of the proceedings in the Synod, that it did not give occasion for irenic debate such as in the case of the Westminster Assembly, but when we examine the canons of Dort (see Schaff, *Creeds*, 550-597; Thomas Scott, *The Articles of the Synod of Dort* [Sprinkle Pub., 1993]; Homer Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* [RFPA, 1980]) and the doctrine it propounds we see that there is really little to debate about. At stake was the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, as well as, an unbiased and logical interpretation of the Word of God.

We may say that it was by the providence of God that the controversy arose in the first place; for through it the Church was not only enriched with a Creed to serve as a standard for future generations, but also enabled to see the logical beauty and self-consistency of the biblical doctrine of salvation as revealed in the Word of God. As we examine the five petals of the TULIP in the next 5 articles, I believe this assertion would become clearer to the praise and glory of our Almighty God who has revealed all things for our instruction and enjoyment of Him.

# TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The 5-Points of Calvinism, viz.,-Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints,-provide perhaps the most succinct, logical and biblical way of understanding God's work of salvation of sinners. These five points were never presented by John Calvin in this way. They are derived with some re-ordering from the Canons of Dort (e.g. Total Depravity corresponds to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Head of the Canons of Dort). But all 5 propositions may be found to be more or less clearly taught in Calvin's writings.

As we examine the 5 points, two things become clear. Firstly, these points can be individually derived from Scripture and not from human experience. And so when we study these points of doctrine we are simply studying a biblical doctrine with the help of a systematic framework. Secondly, these points are logically tied to one another so that it is really impossible to take anyone point out without or change any point without falling into irrationality. Biblical Christianity, we must remember, is not irrational because the Bible is inerrantly and infallibly inspired by God. Though we may not fully comprehend God, we know that God cannot possibly be contradictory, or there is no way for man to know Him at all. So no contradictory propositions can possibly be derived from the Scripture when it is properly exegeted. Thus, because of the logical consistency of the five points, anyone who denies any of these five points will by logical necessity deny all the other four points too. We will demonstrate this when we look at Limited Atonement.

Now; if you have never had any instruction on the five points of Calvinism, you may want to skip the rest of the introduction and begin reading at the first section in the main text. The rest of the introduction does require a little background knowledge to the doctrine to make sense. But if you have had any instruction on Calvinism and know something about what Total Depravity means, then read on.

Let us begin with a couple of important quotations on the doctrine we are considering:

1. That man has not saving grace of himself, not 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 power, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John 15:5: "Without me ye can do nothing."

2. In [the state of man after the Fall], the Free Will of man towards the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost: And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace: For Christ has said, "Without me ye can do nothing. St. Augustine, after having diligently meditated upon each word in this passage speaks thus: "*Christ does not say, Without Me ye can do BUT LITTLE; neither does He say, Without Me, ye cannot do ANY ARDUOUS THING, nor Without Me ye can do it with difficulty: But he says, Without Me ye can do NOTHING! Nor does He say, Without Me ye cannot COMPLETE any thing; but Without Me ye can do NOTHING.*"

Can you agree with the statements above? Now consider the following quote:

Total depravity does not mean that man is not able to do good towards his fellow men. It does however mean that man's nature is wholly sinful, corrupt, and perverse to the extent that sin has affected his parts rendering him absolutely incapable of saving himself from the judgement to come... Even when man performs good works, his motives for doing so are often not pure.

Compare this quote with the earlier two quotations, and I am sure that if you have even a vague idea of what is Total Depravity, you will find the first two quotations to be much more stronger expressions of the doctrine. But, the shocking news is that the third quotation is from a professedly Calvinistic theologian, whereas the first quotation is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the *Remonstrance*, and the second quotation is from Jacobus Arminius (*The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2, trans. James Nichols [Baker, reprinted 1996], 192)! I suspect that the true Arminian would even object to the third quotation as being more pelagian than Arminius was albeit its vagaries.

Over the years, I have come to realise that many who claim to be Calvinistic or understand the 5-points of Calvinism have only a very vague idea of this doctrine, and as a result of it, they either caricature the Arminians or promote a kind of Calvinism that is neither Scriptural or Confessional.

The object of this and the following articles, is to present the 5-points as clearly and precisely as possible. But familiarity breeds contempt, and I am afraid that if you do not give some care and thought as you read that you may not benefit at all from the articles, and your idea of Calvinism may remain at best vague or at worst some form of Arminian notion.

But before I leave the introduction to explain the doctrine of Total Depravity. I must quickly remark that though Arminius and the Arminians do hold to the total fall of man (unlike Pelagians), they also believe that fallen men can

co-operate with the Holy Spirit to bring about regeneration. That is, though the will of man by itself cannot achieve any real good, it can, by prevenient grace (i.e. grace that is *before* salvation) or common grace (as purchased by the death of Christ for all men), respond to the call of the Gospel. Remember that when the Arminians speak about being “born again” they do not mean as the Calvinists do: that it is a sovereign act of God which is irreversible. Arminius makes this clear when he teaches that “regeneration and illumination is not completed in one moment; but that it is advanced and promoted, from time to time, by daily increase” (*Op. Cit.*, 195). Now, illumination in the case of a hitherto unregenerate person is part of the internal vocation (call) to embrace Christ as Saviour and Lord. For the Calvinist, this call is irresistible. But for Arminius:

“Internal vocation is granted even to those who do not comply with the call.

All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the Gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of *the Elect* and of *the Reprobate*” (*Op. Cit.*, 721).

The two carefully crafted Arminian statements quoted earlier sounds very orthodox because it neglects to mention all these additional facts. But if you think about carefully, you should be able to see how the same statements provide room for what we are making explicit with Arminius' own words here (see also *Canons*, Head 3 & 4, Rej. 5).

### **Total Depravity Defined**

Total Depravity refers to the fact that man's moral nature since the fall is corrupt, perverse and sinful throughout, so that nothing he does, think, or speak can be in any way good or pleasing in God's sight at all.

Note that Total Depravity does not mean that since the fall, man has become *in practice* as utterly deprave as he can be, else the world would be filled with psychopaths or Hitlers. Make no mistake, every man, being dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1) has *in principle* the potential to be worst than Hitler given the right environment. However, fallen man remains an image bearer of God with a conscience (Rom 2:14-15), as well as an ability to rationalise as to what is best for self-gratification and self-benefits. These restrains ensure that man does not walk in utter depravity, though being totally depraved, he is unable to do, say or think anything truly good.

And neither is the doctrine concerned at all on whether a deed may appear to be benevolent and good in the eyes of man. But Total Depravity does mean that all that the natural man does, including what appears to be good in the sight of man, is sinful in God's sight (see *Canons*, Head 3 & 4, Art. 4). Even his righteousness are as filthy rags in the eyes of God (Isa 64:6). The natural man is enslaved to sin and Satan, blind to truth and rebellious towards God. He is dead in sin, not just morally sick.

Another way of thinking about Total Depravity is to think of it as Total Inability, i.e. that the natural man is unable to do any that may be regarded by God as good and therefore contributory to his own salvation. The Westminster Confession of faith (*WCF* 9.3) views Total Depravity from this angle:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: [Rom 5:6; 8:7; Jn 15:5] so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good [Rom 3:10, 12], and dead in sin [Eph 2:1, 5. Col 2:13], is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto [Jn 6:44, 65; Eph 2:2–5; 1 Cor 2:14; Tit. 3:13, 4–5].

Essentially, this would also rule out the Arminian notion that the natural man can exercise faith and so co-operate with the Holy Spirit to respond to the call of the Gospel. The only way man can be saved is if God sovereignly, monergistically (i.e. God working alone) frees him from his natural bondage to sin, and translates him into the state of grace so that he is enable freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good, including evangelical repentance and faith (see *WCF* 9.4).

Yet another way of looking at Total Depravity is to think of it as Radical Corruption. This refers to the fact that the natural man is corrupt in his heart or the core of his being. The heart is the well-spring from which all that a person does, thinks or say, flows from. Thus Solomon tells us: “Out of [thy heart] are the issues of life” (Prov 4:22). Thus the Lord Himself says: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things (Mt 12:35; cf. 7:18, 15:19). Now, if the heart is corrupt than nothing that the will does can be good.

We must remember that the liberty of man's will was *not* affected by the fall. But the will is not free to act independently. It is always bounded to the heart of man, and always does what the heart regards as most desirable. Since the heart of the natural man is corrupt and hates God, it can never desire God, and so the will can never choose God. And since the love and glory of God is never in the heart of the natural man, he does not fail to sin in every exercise of his will. When we think of Total Depravity as Radical Corruption, we see immediately that the

door of salvation is not shut to anyone. Rather, the natural man hates the owner of the house and will flee from the door unless his heart is changed.

This fact alone would destroy the Arminian argument that ability to obey the Gospel must be universal viz.: (1) God cannot command us to do anything beyond our ability, for otherwise he cannot hold us responsible for failing to obey. (2) The Word of God does command all men without exception to obey the Gospel on the pain of damnation. (3) Therefore the ability to obey the Gospel must be universal.

Notwithstanding the sovereign predestination of God, the inability of the reprobate to obey the Gospel rests in their hearts. But there is more, for the Scripture proves beyond doubt that the natural man is totally depraved.

### **Total Depravity Proven**

The doctrine of Total Depravity is seen throughout the Scriptures. Particularly, there are verses and passages which tell us how depravity originated in Adam and is propagated by natural generation; and there are verse which speak about the universality of Total Depravity; and there are verses which clearly indicate the depth of our depravity; and then there are verses which teaches us the consequence of our depravity.

#### ***Its Source & Propagation***

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they did not fall as private individuals. Adam was God's appointed representative for all mankind who would descend from him by natural generation.

When Adam fell, his Fall affected all mankind in two principle ways,-comprehended in the theological term *Original Sin*,-namely: (1) all men are imputed (credited) with his guilt and so are regarded as guilty before God; (2) all men inherits Adam's fallen nature. Our catechism expresses the doctrine elegantly:

The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in (1) the *guilt* of Adam's first sin, the *want* of original righteousness, and the *corruption* of his whole nature,-which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it (*WSC* 18).

How do we prove this doctrine from Scripture?

Firstly, the fact that we are imputed with Adam's guilt is clearly taught particularly by the apostle Paul such as when he insists:

“Wherefore, as by one man [i.e. Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12); and “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22)

Just as the righteousness of Christ is imputed on His elect whom He represents, the guilt of Adam was imputed on the world. Now, if you think of Total Depravity from the angle of Total Inability or Radical Corruption, it will probably occur to you that the guilt of Adam's sin does not directly affect our motions in life. But think for a moment of infants dying in infancy or in the mother's womb. Such may not have occasions yet to engage in actual transgressions, but are they not regarded as sinners in the sight of God too? Yes, for “all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). Even elect infants dying in infancy must be “regenerated [to remove original inclination to sin], and saved by Christ [by the application of His blood], through the Spirit” (*WCF* 10.3).

Secondly, the fact that all mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation (i.e. not supernaturally conceived) inherits Adam's fallen nature is attested by Job: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). His friend Eliphaz correctly concurred: “What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (Job 15:14).

David was essentially expressing the same notion in his penitential psalm: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5). Note that David was not so much as referring to his mother's sin, as if to blame his sin on his mother. He was rather referring to the fact that he was a sinner from birth. We sin because we are sinners, we do not become sinners because we sin. “The wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray as they be born, speaking lies” says David (Ps 58:3).

#### ***Its Universality***

The fact that Adam's depravity passes down to all men ought to all men ought to be sufficient to convince us of its universality-that it affects all except the Lord Jesus Christ who was not born of ordinary generation. But the Scripture leaves us without doubt by clear statements which specifically focuses on the universality of depravity. The Psalmist reflects this thought in various verses, such as: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, *who shall stand?*” (Ps 130:3); “And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for *in thy sight shall no man living be justified*” (Ps 143:2). The point is if God were to judge men without mercy, none will be innocent because all have sinned. Paul confirms this doctrine in his epistle to the Romans:

“...we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that *they are all under sin*; As it is written, *There is none righteous, no, not one*...They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; *there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (Rom 3:9-10,12).

### ***Its Depth***

We have seen that Total Depravity extends to the whole world without exception. We must prove now that the Total Depravity extends to the whole being of man. This is most emphatically taught in the Scriptures using several imageries.

Firstly, the apostle Paul when he declares that while we were natural men, we “were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1; c.f. Col 2:13). This is a most important imagery, which should constantly bear in mind. An unregenerate man is spiritually dead. He can be compared to Lazarus in the grave, but not to sick man who can stretch out his hand to take a life saving pill.

Secondly, the heart of the natural man is blind and his understanding is dark: “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). His “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). And he cannot savingly understand anything spiritual: “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” (1 Cor 2:14).

Thirdly, the natural man is described as being an enemy of God (Rom 5:10) whose “carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). He is a slave to sin (Rom 6:20) and a captive of Satan to do his will (2 Tim 2:26; cf. 1 Jn 3:10). By this imagery, we see than the natural man is cannot possibly do anything to please God at all. He is radically corrupt and totally unable.

### **The Consequence of Total Depravity**

What is the consequence of Total Depravity? Simply stated: he has “wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation [and] is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto” (WCF 9.3). This fact is again very clearly taught in the Scripture: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). In fact, since the natural man does not understand spiritual things, he does not seek after God: “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11)

The corollary to this fact is that sovereign intervention by way of God is necessary for a man to enter into the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus himself tells us: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn 6:44a) and “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3). We shall see more of these verses and others in our article on Irresistible Grace. But for now, we should already realise that were it not for God's intervention, none of us will ever believe the Gospel. Such a thought ought to humble us to the dust while at the same time filling our hearts with gratitude to the Triune God who loved us with an everlasting love, provided the propitiation for our sins and changed us sovereignly.

### **Conclusion**

Arminians are wrong that men can co-operate with the Holy Spirit to effect their regeneration. How can we do so when our wills are captive to our radically depraved hearts? How can we do so when God's Word testify that nothing we do in our natural state can please God? Arminians may require only one stitch to the garment of salvation, but according to them our destiny is in that stitch, while according to the Bible, that stitch, if added, would pollute the righteousness needed for our salvation, and would make the death of Christ insufficient to save anyone.

# UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Let us begin our examination of the second petal of the Calvinistic Tulip by defining a few terms. These are terms that we can hardly escape from using in this study.

The first term we must define is 'election.' Election very simply refers to the act of God in choosing a people unto Himself. Or, to put it in individualistic terms, it refers to God's choosing of certain individuals to enjoy His love for all eternity. The *Canons of Dort* puts it this way:

Election is the immutable purpose of God, by which, before the foundations of the world were laid, He chose, out of the whole human race, fallen by their own fault from their primeval integrity into sin and destruction, according to the most free good pleasure of His own will, and of mere grace, a certain number of men, neither better nor worthier than others, but lying in the same misery with the rest, to salvation in Christ; whom He had, even from eternity, constituted Mediator and Head of all the elect, and the foundation of Salvation...(Head 1, Art. 7).

The second term is 'predestination.' The most obvious meaning of this term speaks of God predetermining our final destination, i.e. the final destination of our souls. But remember that Biblical predestination comprehends not just our final destination, but all that happens in time and space as we head towards the final destination. To put it in another way, election marks out the elect, while predestination marks out their steps (Ps 37:23, Prov 4:18, Heb 12:1).

A third term must also be mentioned, namely 'reprobation.' This is the antithesis of 'election.' If God chose *some* individuals from all mankind to experience salvation, it follows that He must have ordained all the rest to wrath for their sin, and therefore passes them by when He extends grace to the elect for their salvation. The apostle Paul calls the reprobates: "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* describes reprobation and the reprobates thus:

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice" (WCF 3.7).

## Arminian Conditional Election

With these definitions, in mind, let us begin by considering a definition of the doctrine of election, viz.:

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; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the gospel in John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," and according to other passages of Scripture also.

If you have been reading the first two articles in this series, you will probably be quite on your guard as you read this statement. You will probably suspect that there is something wrong with it. And so there is, for it is actually the first article of the *Remonstrance*! But can you detect what the problem is? I am afraid that without prior warning, most modern Christian readers, so used to religious platitudes rather than theological propositions, will simply accept the statement as biblical. Indeed, I suspect that even with warning, many of us may have difficulty pin-pointing where the error in the statement is exactly simply because we are so unused to engaging our minds in deep theological discussions.

What then is the error?

Well, the error lies really in a subtle attempt to redefine the idea of God's sovereign predestination! Imagine that you are in prison. You hear that a decree has been passed that some prisoners will be released soon. But upon further enquiry, you hear two versions of what will happen. The first says that the decree includes a list of names and also specific instructions on the entire process of releasing them including when and how the elected prisoners will be released. According to this version, a benefactor had done all that is necessary to secure the release of the chosen prisoners. But the second version says that there is no predetermined list; however, it has been unchangeably decreed that some of the prisoners, at least, will get to sit for an examination for which they will also be given help, and those who pass will be released. According to this second version, the benefactor had done good work to secure a way out for the prisoners, and is even given the opportunity to help the prisoners to win their release.

Now, if you read the Arminian statement again, it will not be difficult to see that it is really the second version that is presented.

In other words, when the Arminians say that God “hath determined” to save 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;” what they mean is that God has determined to save those who would exercise faith (assisted by prevenient grace) to believe and persevere in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Arminian understands to be God's “unchangeable purpose.” But what about the scriptural idea that some are elected unto salvation (eg. Rom 9:11)? Well, the Arminian who is confronted with this question will reply that the elect are simply those whom God, who is omniscient, knew would repent and believe and so be saved.

The favourite proof-text of the Arminians in support of this error is Romans 8:29-30:

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The argument is that since the apostle Paul places foreknowledge before predestination, it must be that foreknowledge (of the person's faith) is the basis of predestination. This is, however, far from what Paul is saying.

*Firstly*, a straightforward interpretation of the verse would suggest that foreknowledge here must be referring essentially to election in Christ or being loved in Christ (Eph 1:4). Paul is imply saying that God predestinates those He elects, and therefore loves and knows.

*Secondly*, Paul goes on to speak about what God would do for those He foreknew, namely: call, justify and glorify. Notice how Paul uses the past tense for each of these acts, including ‘glorified’. This implies that the acts follow one after another in an unbroken chain so that none who were foreknown would not be called, justified or glorified. There is simply no room for any condition based on human response in the chain. Even the call must refer to the effectual call which leads to justification, for if it refers to the external call of preaching, then all who hear the Gospel would be saved. In other words, Paul was saying that salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. It simply does not make sense for him to be saying that God predestinates those He foreknew will come to faith and persevere. Even if the Arminian does not agree with the doctrine of Total Depravity which we have already explained, this text (Rom 8:29-30) does not allow for any contribution on the part of man to his own salvation.

*Thirdly*, if Paul means that predestination is according to God's foreknowledge, then predestination effectively means nothing, since the elect will reach their final destination based on their own efforts (though assisted by prevenient grace).

And thus we affirm with the Synod of Dort that-

This election [unto salvation] was not founded upon foreseen faith and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to the testimony of the apostle: *He hath chosen us* (not because we were, but) *that we should be holy, and without blemish before him in love* (Eph. 1:4) (Head 1, Article 9).

### **Biblical Absolute Predestination**

The doctrine of unconditional election has its foundation not only in the eternal love of God in Christ, but also in the fact that God has ordained all things that comes to pass according to the counsel of His own will. Ironically, this doctrine is suggested by the apostle Paul just one verse above the text used by the Arminian to prove their doctrine of election by foreknowledge, for he says: “And we know that ALL things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). It would be impossible for “ALL things work together for good to them that love God” if God is not in sovereign control over everything. If God is not in control over just one thing, then the proposition that “all things work together for good to them that love God” is no longer true.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (§3.1-2) states the doctrine most succinctly:

- I. God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.
- II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed any thing because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

This doctrine of absolute predestination is questioned by many because it seems to be counter-intuitive, and appears to make men robots. But the fact that it is biblical can hardly be doubted.

For example, God said through Isaiah:

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (Isa 46:9-10).

That the counsel of God comprehends and determines all things and events of every kind,-whether great and small, good or evil,-is also clear from Scripture.

In the *first* place, even events that appear insignificant such as the dropping of our hair from our head are brought about by God according to the counsel of His will (Mt 10:30).

In the *second* place, even things that appear to happen by chance has been decreed and are brought about by the counsel of the Lord: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:33).

In the *third* place disasters are ordained and brought to past by God: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [i.e. disaster]: I the LORD do all these things” (Isa 45:7; cf. Amos 3:6b).

In the *fourth* place, even the acts of the wicked are ordained by God: “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov 16:4). This, God does without violating the freedom and responsibility of His creatures. So Judas is condemned though it was decreed that Christ would be delivered by him (see Mt 26:24). So Peter in his sermon at Pentecost condemned the Jews for their wickedness of slaying the Lord though He was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; see also Acts 4:28).

It is clear that whatever happens in this world is brought about by God according to the counsel of His will. The counsel of God is His living will. It is sovereignly efficacious. No contingencies can frustrate God's will because all power belongs to Him (Ps 62:11). It would hardly be possible to conceive of God's choice of the elect as being contingent upon God's foreknowledge of what man would do. Surely, God knows all things because He sovereignly decreed them and brings them to past. The god of the consistent Arminian, who knows what is going to come to pass not because He ordained all things, but because He simply foresaw all things, is simply not the God of the Bible, but an impotent god of man's imagination.

### **Biblical Unconditional Election**

A consideration of the absolute sovereignty of God ought to convince us that our election is unconditional. But there is more. The Bible explicitly informs us of that verity in order to mortify any remnant of pride that we may retain.

*First* of all, the apostle Paul explicitly declares that our election is made before the foundation of the world, according to the good pleasure of the will of God and His eternal love for us on account of our being represented by Christ:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 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, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:3-6, 11).

*Secondly*, the Scripture is emphatic that election is not conditioned on our good works (including our response to the Gospel). Paul was making this point when he tells us that God has already declared his love for Jacob rather than Esau (who were twins) even before they were born or capable of doing any good or evil:

“(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;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger” (Rom 9:11-12)

The same thought of unconditional election appears elsewhere, e.g. “... there is a remnant according to the *election of grace*. And *if by grace, then is it no more of works*: otherwise grace is no more grace. ....” (Rom 11:5-6); and “[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, *not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*” (2 Tim 1:9).

*Thirdly*, the Scripture teaches in numerous places that faith and repentance are the fruit of election. E.g., “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10; cf. Eph 1:4).

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ declares that all who come unto Him are those whom the Father have given Him in the first place, i.e. elected before the foundation of the world: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn 6:37).

We believe because Christ first laid down His life for us: "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (Jn 10:26, cf. 10:14-15). This same truth of faith being the fruit of election is highlighted by Luke: "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48b).

If faith and repentance are the fruit of the elect, our election certainly cannot be conditioned on them.

*Fourthly*, God claims to have the sovereign prerogative to elect whom He will:

"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. ... So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. ... Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom 9:13, 16, 21)

The Biblical evidence from these four angles is clear, and the conclusion inescapable: Our election is entirely gratuitous, and based on God's sovereign good pleasure. In other words, our election is unconditional, or more specifically, not conditioned upon any contribution on our part.

### **Conclusion**

The doctrine of unconditional election and sovereign predestination is controversial only because man refuses to submit to God's declaration of His majestic sovereignty and man's dismal nothingness. Because of this many objections have been harnessed against the doctrine.

Some say: "The doctrine is ridiculous because it makes God drag the ungrateful sinner kicking and screaming into the kingdom, while denying entrance to those who truly want to enter into it." It does not take much to answer this objection, for no one is ever dragged the kingdom kicking and screaming. Anyone who enters the kingdom enters as one who is born again and finds Christ to be lovely beyond all measures (Jn 3:3). On the other hand no one is denied entrance into the kingdom who wants to enter into it, because no fallen man will ever want to enter but the elect whom the Lord grants efficacious grace.

Some others object that unconditional election makes it immoral for God to hold those who reject the Gospel responsible for their unbelief. This again is easily answered, for none who rejects the Gospel can honestly say: "God prevented me from believing."

Yet others say: "God is unfair to save only a few." The apostle Paul anticipates this question and answers it in Romans 9:14-15-

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

The point is, we are saved by God's unmerited mercy and grace. If we really want fairness, then we are really asking for strict justice, in which case all deserve to perish. Does a prisoner in the death row for treason have the right to charge the king for unfairness if he chooses according to his mercy to release another prisoner guilty of the same crime? Such a person would surely deserve the greater condemnation.

O glorious grace! I was dead in trespasses and sin, without hope in this world, deserving nothing but God's wrath. I hated my Maker, and the only one who could save me. Yet God in His boundless love sent His only begotten to suffer and die for me, and then in the fullness of time, sent His Spirit to open my eyes so I could see my bleeding Saviour nailed to the Cross for my crime. What can my response be, but a humble "Why me, Lord?"

# LIMITED ATONEMENT

This third point of Calvinism (2nd Head of the Canons of Dort), is perhaps the most debated point on the doctrine of salvation in the modern church. But interestingly, the Arminian article on this point is the most explicit of the 5 articles of the *Remonstrance*:

That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior 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, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in the First Epistle of John 2:2: "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (*Remonstrance*, Art. II).

Understandably, this article,-that Christ died for the world without exception,-would be affirmed by almost all professedly evangelical churches around the world since the majority of such churches (esp. in America) are Arminian. But to complicate the matter, there are those who profess to be Calvinistic and fundamental who would also defend the Arminian doctrine on this point. This is particularly true of churches that are professedly Dispensational (see *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 1, issue 51). And to further complicate the matter, there are also churches that claim to be Reformed and Calvinistic which would either agree to this statement wholesale or adopt an Amyraldian position (see *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 1, issue 7). Often this capitulation to Arminianism is through the influence and infiltration of Dispensationalism into the churches. But be that as it may be, the doctrine of Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption is often so abhorred in various fundamental churches that members who hold to them find it impossible to continue in fellowship and membership.

But all these are really not that important. What is important is whether the doctrine is biblical. If it is we must hold on to it tenaciously and preach it unashamedly. If it is not, then we must reject it and denounce it.

It is my contention that the Canons is right: Christ did not die for the world to save the world without exception (Universalism), neither did He die for the world to make man saveable (Arminianism), nor did He die hypothetically for the world, though actually for the elect (Amyraldism).

Note that when we speak of Limited Atonement, we are not saying that the Atonement is limited in power, we are saying that the purpose of Christ's atonement is specifically for the salvation of His elect alone. It is not intended for the reprobates. To put it in another way, we are saying that Christ suffered and died in the place of His elect (i.e. a substitutionary death; cf. Heb 9:28) to pay the penalty of their sin, to satisfy the justice and wrath of God and to reconcile them to God (i.e. a propitiatory death, cf. Rom 1:18). This is achieved by a double imputation on the Cross, for there the sin of the elect throughout the ages was imputed to Christ who paid the penalty due by His suffering and death (Isa 53:4, 6, 11; 1 Pet 2:24; Col 2:14; Heb 9:28); and there the righteousness of Christ merited throughout His perfectly righteous life was imputed to the elect (cf. Rom 3:22, 5:17).

The intent of His death was the salvation of His elect alone, and therefore the extent (i.e. for whom) of His atonement is the elect alone. There is no real difference between the intent and extent of the atonement as some have of late promoted. Calvinists may differ on the doctrine of the Well-Meant offer of the Gospel, but that should be treated as a different, though related subject.

We shall proceed to demonstrate that the doctrine of Limited Atonement is Scriptural in a few steps. First, we must show that logically only Limited Atonement makes sense. Second, we must show that the Scripture clearly teaches that Christ did not die for everyone without exception, and thirdly, we must answer some objections to the doctrine.

## Logical Derivation

In the first place, arguing from the integrity of the 5 points of Calvinism, we note that (1) all men are totally depraved and will die in sin unless God intervenes; and (2) God has unconditionally elected some to salvation. Putting these two points together, we must infer that God wills and desires the salvation only of the elect, and therefore, it stands to reason that Christ who is God, died only to save the elect.

In the second place, we note that God is perfectly just and will punish all sins. Either they are punished in Christ (for those whom He represents) or they will be punished in the sinners themselves (for the reprobate). This being the case, if Christ died for all the sins of all men, all men will be saved. On the other hand, if He did not die for any one sin of any individual, that individual will have to pay for the sin himself with eternal death: for every sin against an infinite God is worthy of eternal death. The great puritan John Owen put the argument across beautifully:

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God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either [1] all the sins of all men, or [2] all the sins of some men, or [3] some sins of all men. If the last [3], some sins of all men, then have all men

some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved... If the second [2], that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first [1], why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, "Because of their unbelief, they will not believe." But this unbelief, is it a sin or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died from partaking of the fruit of His death? If He did not, then did He not die for all their sins (*The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* [BOT, reprinted 1959], 61-2).

The Arminian concept of the death of Christ that it simply makes salvation possible, really means that Christ's death is not sufficient for the salvation of anyone. This is "Limited Atonement" where the limit is not on whom Christ died for, but on the power and value of the death of Christ!

In Arminianism, the atonement of Christ is like a great wide bridge that reaches half-way across, but for the Calvinist, the atonement is like a narrow bridge that reaches all the way across.

### **Biblical Evidence**

The Biblical evidence for Limited Atonement can be classed under two categories:

#### ***Christ Did Not Die for Everyone***

We have an indication in the Old Testament that the Lord would die only for a limited number of people. In particular, the Prophet Isaiah in speaking about the substitutionary death of Christ tell us that Christ shall "justify *many*; for he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11). In other words, Christ will justify *many* by bearing *their* iniquities, which also means He would not bear the iniquity of *everyone*.

Thus, the Lord Jesus himself, taught His disciples: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for *many*" (Mk 10:45). He did not give His life a ransom for *all*, but for *many*. Then when instituting the Lord's Supper He declares: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for *many* for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28).

Who is the 'many' that the Lord refers to? The Lord leaves us without doubt that it is His sheep or His elect: "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" (Jn 10:14-15). It is clear that by "the sheep", the Lord is referring to His sheep, for He goes on to rebuke those who are not His: "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (Jn 10:14-15). Christ, by His own testimony died for His sheep, His people, the elect. Those who are not His sheep are not the elect, and will not believe.

The same thought of particularism in the redemption purchased by Christ is echoed by the apostles. Paul declares: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:31b-32). Who is this 'us'? Paul does not leave us to guess: It is the elect of God, for he continues: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33).

In another passage, Paul seeking to encourage husbands to love their wives to the point of being willing to die for them, urges: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph 5:25). Christ did not lay down His life for the world, but for His bride, the Church.

This explains why the Lord specifically indicates in His High Priestly Prayer that He does not pray for everyone, but for as many as have been given to Him, i.e. His elect:

"<sup>2</sup> As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him...<sup>9</sup> I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. ...<sup>20</sup> Neither pray I for these [i.e. those who have already believed] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (Jn 17:2, 9, 20)

It would be absurd to think of Christ dying an agonising death for everyone in the world and then refusing to pray for them. It has to be that He is not concerned to save the world, but to save His elect whom He died for, and so continues to intercede for them and them alone (cf. Heb 7:14-15).

#### ***Christ Died to Save, Not to Make Salvation Possible***

The Lord Jesus Christ affirms emphatically that His mission was to save the lost: "For the Son of man is come *to save* that which was lost" (Mt 18:11; Lk 19:10). Never does He say that He came to make sinners saveable. The apostles, accordingly, refers to the work of Christ in definite terms.

Thus, the apostle Paul declares: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15); and “We were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10).

Thus, the apostle Peter affirms: “[Christ Himself] bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were *healed* (1Pet 2:24; cf. 1 Pet 3:18).

Thus, the writer of Hebrews is emphatic that Christ had already obtained salvation for us with the completion of His sacrifice of Himself: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, *having obtained* eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12).

Notice how the apostles use the past tense in these verses to indicate that the work of redemption is complete and our salvation depends on nothing else.

Someone may object: “But if Christ came to make salvation possible, it would also be right to say that he came to save sinners, just as a man who throws a life-buoy to a drowning person is said to be his saving his life.”

But one thing must be borne in mind: There is a colossal difference between a drowning man and a man dead in sin. A man dead in sin cannot help himself. If Christ merely made salvation possible, he would never be saved.

If Christ came to save, and the salvation of the sinner depends on nothing else but what Christ has done in suffering and dying for them, then it follows that Christ must have died only for a limited number of sinners, for, obviously, not every sinner is saved. Indeed, if Christ died for everyone without exception, then God would be unjust to punish any sinner for their sin, for it would mean that He would be punishing them twice: once in Christ, and another time in themselves. Moreover, the idea would make God self-contradictory, for in Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9).

### **‘Problem’ Passages**

We have seen how the Scriptures clearly, consistently and logically show that the atonement of Christ is limited by design. However, there are admittedly, several texts in the Scripture, which appear to speak of the death of Christ in universalistic terms. In this section, we must briefly deal with some of these passages. In the interest of space, we shall not quote the verses, but do request our readers to look them up in the Bible.

***John 1:29, 3:16, 4:42;***

***1 John 2:2, 4:14***

Arminians and those with Arminian tendencies will often cite these verses and simply declare that “God loves the world and Christ died for the world”-by which they mean every person who ever lived. But these verses are easily explained by the fact that the word ‘world’ (*kovsmo*) has at least 8 different meanings in the New Testament. For example, in Luke 2:1, “the world” obviously referred to the Roman world under the rulership of Caesar Augustus; in Acts 17:24 it refers to the entire created order; and in John 15:18, it obviously refer to the unbelieving world. In fact, one need only to examine the 187 times the word *kovsmo* occur in the New Testament to realise that it very seldom refers to “every single human being who ever live” (such as in Rom 3:19). Anyone who tries to use the word ‘world’ or *kovsmo* to speak about Christ dying for everyone without exception, is simply grasping at straws.

What is the meaning of the word ‘world’ as used by the apostle John in all the passages? Well, it cannot be “world without exception.” If this is the meaning in John 1:29 or 1 John 2:2, then God would be guilty of injustice if He punishes anyone in Hell, for Christ would have made them in the sight of God not-guilty by taking away their sin. If John 3:16 refers to the world without exception, then we must conclude that God loves all who are in hell being punished for their sin, and that passages such as Romans 9:13 and Psalm 11:5 are wrong. Again, if John 4:42 and 1 Jn 4:14 refers to the world without exception, then we must conclude that Christ failed in His mission because it is evident that not the whole world is saved.

Some very good sound Calvinistic theologians such as John Owen, John Gill, A.W. Pink, George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford, Herman Hanko, etc, hold that ‘the world’ in these passages refers to the “world of the elect.” This view has merits and fits very well with the doctrine of Limited Atonement. Personally, however, I prefer to see it as “world without distinction organically considered.” That is to say that God loves the world which comprises Jews and Gentiles because of the Jewish and Gentile elect in her.

As an illustration, I may say: “I love Aunty Amy's bakes” even though when it comes down to the details, some of her cakes and bread are awful to me. You see, I can say I love her bakes and will go out of the way to get them because she makes my favourite cakes and breads, so that overall, she is my favourite baker. In other words, I am really using the term bakes to encompass cakes and bread. I don't want to say: “I love Aunty Amy's cakes” because I really love some of her bread too. And as my emphasis is on the fact that I really enjoy those of her cakes and bread apart from those I dread, I speak of all her bakes collectively or organically.

The same is true, I believe, with the Lord's use of the word 'world' that we are considering. The point is that God has a great love for the elect both amongst the Jews as well as the Gentiles. God does not love every Jew or Gentile, but because He has His elect amongst the Jews and Gentiles, He speaks of loving the world or more specifically, the world without distinction, organically considered. This interpretation appears to me to fit better into the contexts of the passages.

For example, John 4:42 is a statement made by the Samaritans to indicate that Christ is the Saviour not only of the Jews, but Samaritans and Gentiles as well (contrast with Jn 4:22). Moreover, if John 3:16 refers to the "world of the elect" then it seems superfluous for the Lord to say: "whosoever believeth in him should not perish," for all the elect will certainly believe. The fact is that the statement makes no direct mention of the elect, but only that God's love is not confined to the Jews. It is true that God's love ultimately rests only upon the elect, but this is a proposition that must be found in other passages. And again, note how 1 John 2:2 parallels the prophetic statement of Caiaphas that: "Jesus should die for that nation [Israel]; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad [i.e. the elect of God in the other nations in the world]" (Jn 11:51-52). Caiaphas was prophetically saying that Christ would be the propitiation for sins of the elect in Israel: and not for only for them, but also for the sins of the elect of God in other nations.

### **1 Timothy 2:4, 4:10**

In 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul intimates that "[God] will have all men to be saved." Likewise in 1 Timothy 4:10, he speaks of the "living God" as "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

As such, these two verses are also commonly used to mean that God desires to save all men, and that the only reason why not all men are saved is because God has left the final decision to man.

We must understand, however, that "all men" in 1 Timothy 2:4 does not refer to all men *without exception*. We can be sure of this, for in the immediate context, Paul makes it clear that "all men" refers to all classes of men. He says in the first 2 verses-

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for *all men*; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim 2:1-2).

On the other hand, the context of 1 Timothy 4:10 suggests that Paul is not there referring to salvation from sin and Satan, else the verse would suggest that "all men" are in a certain sense saved. We agree with Calvin that:

...the word *swth;r* is here a general term, and denotes one who defends and preserves. He means that the kindness of God extends to all men. And if there is no man who does not feel the goodness of God towards him, and who is not a partaker of it, how much more shall it be experienced by the godly, who hope in Him? (*in loc*).

### **2 Peter 3:9**

This well-known verse reads: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

It is not difficult to see how this would often be cited by Arminians to prove that Christ died for all men. For if, as it appears, God desires for all without exception come to repentance, then Christ must surely have Christ died for all.

However, if that is the case, then the verse would either imply universal salvation since God can and does carry out His will, or it would imply that Christ will never return! If the Lord has delayed His return because He is not willing that anyone in the world should perish, then wouldn't He never return. After all, if Christ should return at any point, then every unbeliever at that moment will perish regardless of whether they have already been given sufficient time to repent or not.

What then? Well, the fact is that the words 'all' and 'any' in the verse is clearly restricted by the pronoun 'us.' Peter is clearly referring to believers (and by extension all the elect) when he says "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise... but is longsuffering to us-ward" (cf. 2 Pet. 1:1-4; Acts 2:39). Indeed, what Peter is saying is that the Lord is not willing that any of the elect should perish, and therefore, He will return only after the full number of the elect has been effectually called.

### **Romans 5:18; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

The surface reading of 1 Corinthians 15:22 and Romans 5:18 does suggest that Christ died for all. But we need not take much effort to discover that the 'all' in the context of both verses mean "all the elect" as contrasted with all who are represented by Adam. Likewise in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Paul is writing to encourage the believers that

Christ died for them and therefore, they “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them.” The verse would not make sense if ‘all’ refers to everyone in the world.

## **2 Peter 2:1**

This verse reads-“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

On the surface, this verse appears to suggest that Christ died to purchase redemption even for the false teachers and prophets.

But again, it cannot be that anyone purchased by Christ could perish (Rom 8:34-35). Scripture must interpret Scripture, and no interpretation must contradict another interpretation, for all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Therefore, it is imperative that we find an interpretation that is consistent with whatever else has been established as true. With this in mind, one compelling interpretation for 2 Peter 2:1 is that Peter is actually using an *ad hominem* argument rather than stating a doctrinal proposition. By this argument, he is suggesting that the false teachers actually claim that Christ bought them too.

## **Conclusion**

We have shown that Limited Atonement is a biblical doctrine. The Arminian, rather than having an atonement that is unlimited, is really propounding an atonement of Christ that is weak and powerless to save. Worse than that, it makes God a failure because He desires to save all mankind, but His plan has largely been frustrated because the greater part of all mankind is currently suffering eternal damnation because of unbelief. In fact, if it is true that it is God's will or desire that all mankind be saved, then He would not only be a failure, but would also be contradictory, for it is surely by the appointment of God that the greater part of all nations in Old Testament times was in darkness, and a large number of people in the world today are without any opportunity to hear the Gospel. It is no wonder that Arminianism leads so easily to liberalism. After all, the god pictured in Arminianism is an impotent god who is helpless to save. How could anyone of us knowing this fact, be apathetic as to whether Calvinism or Arminianism is right?

It has often been objected that the doctrine of Limited Atonement makes it impossible to preach the Gospel. And so it has been said that anyone who believes in Limited Atonement and cannot tell an unbelieving sinner that Christ died for him is a hyper-Calvinist. This strange definition of a hyper-Calvinist, however, rather than proving that Limited Atonement is wrong shows how far removed from the Scripture is the modern conception of Gospel preaching, for as John Owen has astutely observed:

When God calleth upon men to believe, he doth not, in the first place, call upon them to believe that Christ died for them, but that there is no name under heaven given unto men whereby they might be saved but only of Jesus Christ, through whom salvation is preached;... this one thing... is a sufficient basis and ground for all those general precepts of preaching the gospel unto all men... (*The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* [BOT, reprinted 1989], 186).

Having said this, it should be noted that we are not saying that Christ's death is not sufficient, or powerful enough to save everyone if God intends to save everyone. Certainly it is. The apostle Paul said to the Ephesians: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of *God*, which he hath *purchased with his own blood*.” Notice how he speaks of the blood shed as God's blood. If this is so, then surely it is infinitely powerful.

However, since Christ did not intend for the atonement to be for anyone else other than the elect, it is superfluous and misleading to use the phrase “sufficient for the world, efficient for the elect.” Generally, those who use this phrase use it either to tone down the perceived harshness of the doctrine of Limited Atonement, or to give a pseudo-theological basis for preaching an Arminian gospel which appeals to sinners by stating that Christ died for them,-rather than simply presenting the gospel and issuing a call to repent and believe.

But really, to use the phrase would be like a personnel manager of a large company saying to all its job applicants that the company is large enough to take everyone, but only a predetermined number will be given the job. How does that help the applicants? How does it tone down the ‘harshness’ of rejection? How does it give basis for telling every applicant that they are wanted?

The fact is that in discussing Limited Atonement we are dealing with the design, extent and intent of the atonement. The question of sufficiency adds nothing to the understanding of the doctrine, but tends rather to confuse and to encourage practices that are inconsistent with it.

# IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

Calvinistic theologians generally distinguish between the external call of the Gospel and the internal call of the Word and Spirit. The external of the Gospel is given in the preaching of the Gospel and calls all without exception to repent of sin and believe in Christ. This call is resistible, and thus the Lord teaches: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:14; cf. Jn 8:43-44a). On the other hand, the internal call is given only to the elect. This call, which is referred to in Romans 8:30, involves the planting of spiritual ears in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and is therefore always efficacious. The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of this effectual call thus:

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 (*WCF* 10.1).

When the Calvinist speaks of *Irresistible Grace*, he is referring to the nature of this efficacious call.

## Controversy with Arminians

We are plucking the petals of TULIP one by one in order in our discussion of the 5 points of Calvinism. This acronym order beautifully shows the work of the Triune God in our salvation: The Father electing unconditionally, the Son dying for the elect, and the Holy Spirit quickening the elect who are by nature dead in sin, and planting spiritual ears so that they may respond to the Gospel.

However, this may not be the best order to discuss the subject because the doctrine of Irresistible Grace follows logically the doctrine of Total Depravity. In the *Remonstrantia*, the Arminian expression which corresponds to this doctrine is found Article IV, which immediately follows Article III on Freewill or the ability of man (antithesis of Total Depravity). The fathers of Dort, when drafting the Canons, which follows the order of the *Remonstrantia*, found it necessary to treat the two articles together, viz. Head III & IV: "Of the Doctrine of Man's Corruption, and of the Method of His Conversion to God." This is because it is quite impossible to know how the Arminians differ from the Calvinists in the third article without bringing in the fourth article. In the same way, we cannot get a full picture of Total Depravity without at least some reference to Irresistible Grace.

The reason for this, is that the Arminians also claim to hold to Total Depravity and that without grace not one may be saved. Thus, a Calvinist reading the third article of the *Remonstrantia* by itself will probably agree with it wholeheartedly. It is only when we begin to discuss what grace is and does, that we begin to see where the two systems differ. When the Calvinist speaks about grace in the salvation of sinners, he is referring to God sovereignly and monergistically changing the heart or nature of the sinner so that his will which is bounded to his inclination which is hitherto dead to sin, is now made alive and freed from the bondage of sin to embrace Christ (see *Canons, Heads 3 & 4, art. 11*). Arminius, on the other hand, writes: "grace is so attempered [sic] and commingled with the nature of man, as not to destroy within him the liberty of his will, but to give it a right direction, to correct its depravity, and to allow man to possess his own proper motions" (*Works* 1.628-9).

One way of looking at the difference is that Calvinists believe that grace is particular and monergistic: that it proceeds from the fountain of God's electing love and sovereignly brings about regeneration and conversion; whereas Arminians holds that grace is universal and synergistic: that it proceeds from Christ's death for the world and co-operates with the free-will of man to effect faith and regeneration.

Another way of looking at the difference is as proposed by Arminius himself when he quite rightly asserts: "The whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, 'Is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?'" (*Works* 1.664). We would of course not say that God's converting grace is an "irresistible force," which is an Arminian caricature to suggest that Calvinists believe that the elect are forced into the kingdom kicking and screaming. But it is fair to say that the difference is whether grace is resistible or irresistible, or whether grace properly denoted is necessarily efficacious or not. Thus the fourth article of the *Remonstrantia* insists that grace "is not irresistible, inasmuch as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost, Acts 7, and elsewhere in many places."

We will have to examine the Scripture cited as well as others cited by Arminius, but before we do so, it is useful, I believe to think for a moment what the Arminians are essentially saying. They are saying that when the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit tries His best to woo the hearer to believe, but that ultimately, it is the hearer who finally decides if he wants to believe. If the hearer refuses to believe, there is nothing the Holy Spirit can do about it. In this way, whether we profess to hold to Unconditional Election or not, we will have to conclude that God's grace can be rejected and His will can be frustrated.

## Verses that Suggest “Resistible Grace”

Although the *Remonstrantia* asserts that “it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost... in many places,” it does not give any specific examples. Arminius, however, lists three classes of verses, viz: (1) such as teaches that grace is capable of “being resisted”-Acts 7:51; (2) such as teaches that grace can be “received in vain”-2 Corinthians 6:1 and (3) those that suggest that “it is possible for man to avoid yielding his assent to it; and to refuse all co-operation with it”- Hebrews 12:15; Matthew 23:37; Luke 7:30 (*Op. Cit.*, 1.629). These verses must be examined. But once again in the interest of space, we will not quote the all the verses in full, but request the readers to check them up in the Bible.

### *Acts 7:51*

This verse does indeed teach that the Holy Ghost can in some sense be resisted. Firstly, He is resisted when the hearers resist the Holy Spirit speaking to them by the prophets, apostles and ministers of the Gospel. Secondly, He is resisted when the hearers resist the convictions and dictates of their own conscience when their minds are in some sense irradiated with some sparks of truth by the Holy Spirit (cf. Hebrews 6:4 and Calvin *in loc*).

In other words, the resistance against the Holy Spirit that this verse speaks about is resistance to the work of the Spirit in the external call of the Gospel, which no Calvinist will deny is possible. But the external call for the reprobate, in the final analysis, can hardly be regarded as grace, for to these God “designs the call to be a savor of death [cf. 2 Cor 2:16], and the ground of a severer condemnation” (*ICR* 3.24.8).

Thus we are convinced that Acts 7:51 should not be read as suggesting that the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration can be resisted.

### *2 Corinthians 6:1*

Again, this verse does not refer to the regenerating work of the Spirit in the heart of sinner, rather, it refers to the preaching of the Gospel (cf. 2 Cor 6:2). The offer of the Gospel is here denoted “grace of God” simply because it is a presentation God's grace. It may be argued from what we have said regarding Acts 7:51 that it seem incongruous to call the preaching of the Gospel “grace of God.” But we must remember that the primary purpose of the Gospel is for salvation rather than condemnation (Jn 3:17). Moreover, as Paul is addressing the members of a church of Christ, it is perfectly natural that he speaks of the Gospel in the designation as it appertains the better part of the congregation, namely the elect. In other words, the Gospel to the church viewed organically (as a whole) is the offer of God's grace, and the reprobates are those who would receive the “grace of God in vain.”

### *Hebrews 12:15*

In this verse, it is unlikely that the phrase “grace of God” refer to the Gospel. Rather it probably refers to the work of grace pertaining to regeneration and conversion. Albeit, the apostle is not writing to an individual but to a body of believers with the possibility of false professors being found in it. Again with the principle that the whole is to be known by the better part together with judgement of charity (Heb 6:9), the congregation as a whole may be regarded as having received grace. But ultimately, those “fail of the grace of God” were never, in the first place, recipients of grace (cf. Mt 24:13).

### *Matthew 23:37*

This verse is used to show that Christ desired the salvation of the Jews, but his desire is frustrated because they refused to come to him. Arminius used it to show that the grace of God can be frustrated. But this interpretation could only stand if in the Lord's statement, “Jerusalem” refers to the same group of people as “thy children.” But a plain reading of this verse would show us immediately that this is not the case. Although “Jerusalem” as a city is personified in the Lord's statement, his statement can only be understood substantively if we view it as being received by the religious and political representatives of city. In other words, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” would refer to the leaders while “thy children” would refer to the (elect) citizens in the city. The resistance to being gathered under the wings of Christ come not from those whom Christ desired to gather, but from the opposition of the leaders of the city. Whatever, we may derive from this verse, it certainly does not mean Christ desire the salvation of everyone in Jerusalem much less the world.

### *Luke 7:30*

Here, “the counsel of God” must surely refer to the revealed will of God, rather than the decretive will of God since the latter cannot be known, much less rejected. Therefore, this verse again furnish no prove that God's grace is resistible.

## Irresistible Grace Proven

In order to prove Irresistible Grace, we need only to prove: (1) that the natural man will not choose Christ; (2) that regeneration is wholly a work of the Holy Spirit without any co-operation from the sinner; and (3) all who are elect will come to Christ.

### ***The Natural Man will not Choose Christ***

If the natural man is able, by prevenient grace (grace prior to regeneration), or otherwise, to choose Christ, and all who comes to Christ comes through co-operation with prevenient grace, then it must follow that the grace that leads to salvation is resistible. On the other hand, if no one, -whether elect or reprobate, -has any ability to choose Christ, and yet the elect are saved, then it must follow that the grace of conversion is particular and irresistible.

When we examine the Scriptures we find that it is indeed true that the natural man cannot choose Christ. We have seen this fact more or less when we examined the doctrine of Total Depravity, so we will simply highlight some verse from Scripture here. First the Lord says: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Jn 6:44a). The word translated drag (*eIlkuvw*) is never used to mean "persuade" or "woo" or "co-operate with." In the eight times it is used in the New Testament, it is used in a different context with John 6:44. In these instances, the word is used to describe the drawing of a sword (Jn 18:10); the dragging up of a net (Jn 21:6, 11); dragging a person by force (Acts 16:19; Acts 21:30; Jas 2:6). In none of these cases do we find the object being drawn co-operating. So, it is quite clear that when the Lord say "except the Father... draw him," He is referring to a sovereign work rather than simply moral persuasion.

Although man is a free agent, His will is bounded to his inclination which prior to regeneration "loved darkness rather than light" (Jn 3:19). His will is taken captive by Satan, and he cannot but sin. Paul express this fact when he suggests that in our unregeneracy, we walked "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience... , fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath..." (Eph 2:2-3).

### ***Regeneration is Wholly a Work of the Spirit***

The grace of regeneration can only be resistible if it is received synergistically: through the co-operation of the will of man and of God. But we find in the Scripture, that this is not the case. Regeneration is always portrayed as a wholly and sovereignly the work of the Spirit. This fact is taught very powerfully and clearly in the Scriptures by using several metaphors to describe regeneration.

The Lord himself used the metaphor of childbirth and blindness when He told Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). One who is not born again is blind in his heart (Eph 4:18) cannot see the kingdom of God (with spiritual eyes), and so there is no way for him to enter into it. But just as a baby is totally passive in childbirth so is a man being born again by the will of God through Spirit of Christ (see Jn 1:12-13). The new-birth or regeneration, in other words, is monergistic. It is totally the work of the Spirit with no contribution from man. Similarly just as a blind man cannot help his own blindness, a spiritually blind man cannot help himself, but needs the healing of the Lord (through regeneration).

Another metaphor, which is used both by the Lord and the apostle Paul is that of resurrection from the dead. The Lord says: "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (Jn 5:21; see also John 5:24-25). Writing to the Ephesians, Paul says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Eph 2:4-5; cf. Col 2:13).

This metaphor is especially important because it shows us that the unregenerate person is not as Arminius claims him to be: a beggar who is able to extend his hand to receive alms. Arminius had argued that such a stretching out of the hands to receive the gift does not at all make the gift less than a 'pure gift' (*Works* 2.52). But the fact is that the Scripture tells us the sinner is dead. He has to be made alive. Before he is made alive, he contributes precisely nothing to the receipt of the gift.

Indeed, Paul goes on to say that even our faith is a gift of God: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Of course, faith is not something that can be poured into the heart, and so it must be a gift by way of spiritual resurrection, or effectual calling.

Yet another metaphor of regeneration is that of heart change representing a total change in nature. This is particularly used by the Lord through Ezekiel and Jeremiah, for example, He says through Ezekiel:

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezk 11:19-20; cf. 36:26-27; Jer 31:33).

Notice how the words "I will" is repeated and emphasised to indicate that the change will be effected by God sovereignly, without any co-operation from the sinner.

In the same vein of thought, in the New Testament, Luke uses the idea of an opening of the heart to describe the conversion of Lydia: “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). Notice the order: The Lord opened her heart, and then she attended to the Gospel. Again, it should be noted that this change of heart, which results in repentance and faith is not something that is self-generated, but is granted sovereignly by God (Acts 11:18; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:25-26).

So great is this change in heart or nature, that the Scripture speaks of the regenerate as being a “new creation”: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17; see also Gal 6:15).

If we examine all these instances of Scripture without bias, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the regenerating grace of God is wholly the work of the Spirit without any co-operation from sinners. If that is so, then, it necessarily follows that the grace of regeneration is irresistible: there is no room for co-operation, much less resistance.

#### *All the Elect Will Come*

Yet another argument for the particularity and efficacy of grace of regeneration is the fact that all who are elect will be saved. In other words, all whom God intends to save will be irresistibly drawn to Christ. Again, this is clearly taught in the Scripture.

First, the Lord says: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn 6:37). In other words, all who are elected will come.

Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, affirms this fact when he described the conversion of the Gentiles in these words: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

The apostle Paul puts it in another way when he paints the order of salvation as an unbroken chain of God's work beginning from election (foreknow) to calling to glorification:

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30).

Notice how Paul speaks about the certainty of glorification for all the elect. If all the elect will definitely attain unto glorification, and the grace of God is only for the elect, then it follows, once again, that the grace of conversion is irresistible.

### **Conclusion**

I believe we have proven beyond doubt that the grace of God in conversion is irresistible. Many Calvinists today talk about common grace. I have no great difficulty with the thought if by it is meant that God sends the rain and the sunshine on all without distinction (Mt 5:45). However, we must be careful not to extrapolate from there that God therefore desires all to be saved; or that common grace is prevenient grace which so assist, awake, follow and co-operate with the unregenerate without distinction so that all who comes under the preaching of the Gospel is able to exercise faith unto salvation without being irresistibly drawn by Christ. Such a doctrine is inherently Arminian.

One of the most powerful illustration of salvation is entering a door: “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (Jn 10:9).

Hearing the outward call is like seeing the door to salvation, but left to ourselves, we would refuse to enter it. The world and sin seem to have so much more to offer. But when the Holy Spirit grants us a new birth, we find the door compellingly attractive, and we enter into it willingly. No; we are not dragged through the door kicking and screaming, we enter in willingly, our hearts having been changed. We enter thinking that we have found the door. But once we enter the door, we discover that written at the back of the door are the word: “You have not found me, I have found you.” It was the Father who marked us out from eternity in the first place; Christ had in the second place paid for our sin; and the Holy Spirit had made us alive, and implanted spiritual ears and eyes to see the door and to behold the majesty and greatness of the King.

Calvinism alone is true to the Scripture and highly exalts the sovereignty and glory of God. Arminianism exalts human free will and leads to humanism and liberalism. Arminians have also no real argument against the soteriology of Roman Catholicism (which is Semi-Pelagian or Arminian) or even those who hold to Baptismal Regeneration (which is founded on the premise that faith precedes regeneration and therefore it is not wrong to add baptism before regeneration).

## PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

We have come now to look at the final petal of the Calvinistic flower which is also the final head of the Canons of Dort under the same appellation. In simple terms, this doctrine answers the question: Can a regenerate and justified person fall from the state of grace? The Calvinists says no! The Arminians - at least the Remonstrants - appear to be unsure, judging from the *Remonstrantia*. We will briefly analyse their position shortly, but it will be helpful for us first to comment on the various other phrases professing Calvinists use to describe this doctrine so that we have a clearer understanding of what it entails.

### Synonyms?

First, one of the most common phrase used is "Eternal Security." This phrased is very popular among Dispensationalists, but it often belies the acceptance of the concept of "Carnal Christians." We will say more about "Carnal Christians" in another article, but very briefly, it teaches that once a person has prayed to receive Christ, he will be saved even if he exhibits no repentance for sin and therefore do not have Christ as Lord. According to those who hold to this doctrine (mostly Dispensationalists), such a person will be saved as by fire. "Eternal Security" when it is thus coloured with this doctrine of Carnal Christianity is far from what the Synod of Dort propounded. The synod taught "Perseverance of the Saints", not "Preservation of Sinners."

The second phrase, which is commonly used, is: "Once saved always saved!" This phrase is often used with the same significance as Eternal Security, but it is sometimes used by Calvinists who wish to make theology more easily acceptable to modern Christians-many of whom have distaste for theological terms. Unfortunately, this phrase has contributed to the common modern notion that God's work of salvation in the life of the sinner is completed when the sinner "prays to receive Christ." One of the effects of this misunderstanding is that many modern believers would find it very jarring to read important theological statements such as in the WSC 91 which speaks about the sacraments becoming "effectual means of salvation." And so there are some (including well-known writers!) who, on account of these statements, assert that the Westminster divines taught baptismal regeneration and salvation by works! The reality is that the older theologians have more correctly reflected the usage of the term 'salvation' in Scriptures (e.g. Phil 2:12; 1 Th 5:18 etc) when they speak about salvation as including the work of sanctification of the Spirit of Christ.

One other phrase that is commonly used, often by very sound Calvinistic theologians, is "Preservation of the Saints." This term has great merit and is especially useful to emphasise the fact that the only reason why a Christian remains a Christian, once he is regenerated and justified, is the power of God.

Personally, however, I would still prefer the wordings of the Canons, for it especially emphasises the fact that the saints (Christians) persevere as saints throughout their Christian journey. In this way, two of the common Arminian objections to the doctrine,-viz.: (1) that it promotes carnal security; and (2) that there are many real life examples of Christians who fall out and denounce the faith,-are answered. The fact is, all Calvinists will maintain that anyone whose life shows no evidence of the working of grace cannot be regarded as a true Christian; and anyone who does not persevere to the end has simply never been a true Christian, united with Christ and possessing a true living faith in Him in the first place. The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses this truth positively in the words: "They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (*WCF* 17.1).

### The Arminian Contention

Although there are many flavours of Arminianism today, it is helpful for us to look at what was submitted to the Synod of Dort by the Arminians so that we may better understand what the Calvinistic or Biblical doctrine is. Here, then, is the first article of the *Remonstrantia*:

That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and have 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, extends to them His hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire His help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand". 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 (Art V, “Articuli Arminiani sive Remonstrantia” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, p. 548)

Notice, firstly, that the Arminians agree that “those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith... [cannot] be misled nor plucked out of Christ's hands.” But, secondly, notice how they emphasise that the Christian is preserved only by the “*assisting* grace of the Holy Ghost.” In other words, the Christian remains a Christian by his own effort, assisted by grace. Remember that for the Arminians, regeneration does not involve a permanent change. And so, thirdly, since the freewill of the Christian is the final determining factor in the Christian life, it cannot be certain from a theological standpoint to assert whether the Christian is “capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ... of becoming devoid of grace.”

### **The Response of Dort**

What did the Synod of Dort say to the Arminian contentions? First, they reassert the fact that a Christian is a Christian by the purpose of God, or in other words, the perseverance of the saints is flows from the fountainhead of the electing grace of God (Head 5, art. 1, 6; rej. 1). Second, they insist that the Christian is regenerated (permanently) by the Holy Spirit and set free from the dominion and slavery of sin (art. 1). This means that the Christian has a new heart or principle of life which is not naturally inclined to sin as in the case of the unregenerate. But thirdly, the Christian is “not entirely in this life [free] from the flesh and the body of sin” (arts. 1, 2). In other words, the Christian has remaining corruption, and though by the grace of God, he is able and desirous to resist temptation, he is also capable of falling into sin (arts. 3, 4). Nevertheless, fourthly, “God is faithful, who confirms them in the grace once mercifully conferred on them, and powerfully preserves them in the same unto the end (art. 4, 7). And fifthly, it must be remembered that the saints persevere “not by their own merits or strength, but by the gratuitous mercy of God [so that] they neither totally fall from faith and grace, nor finally continue in their falls and perish.”

In a word, the Synod of Dort disagrees with the Arminians that the perseverance of the saints is dependent on the effort of the saint. Rather, it insists that saints persevere because God preserves them in grace sovereignly. He does so by firstly preserving the immortal seed, by which they are regenerated (1 Pet 1:23; 1 Jn 3:9); and secondly, by “His own Word and Spirit, He assuredly and efficaciously renews them to repentance” (art. 7). God, in other words is the author and cause of our perseverance.

Also, the Calvinistic position follows logically from the other 4 points which we have already proven from Scripture. For example, if God has elected unconditionally every Christian who will be saved, it follows that none who is elected will be lost, for other wise, it would either mean that God is not sovereign or that election can only be understood retrospectively, which also means that God did precisely nothing when it is said that He elected. Additionally, if Christ died to pay for the penalty of the sin of the elect, then if any of the elect perish, it would mean that the death of Christ is insufficient even to pay for the sins of those who perished.

### **Perseverance of the Saints Proven Biblically**

The Westminster Confession of Faith which was written some years after the Canons of Dort, not only provides the most succinct and eloquent definition of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints; but it also provides the most comprehensive argument from Scripture for the doctrine:

*WCF* 17.2 This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the degree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

Note first from this statement how the Westminster divines nails the error of the Arminians on the head: they have made the perseverance of the saints ultimately dependant upon man's free will. Second, notice the fourfold arguments: (1) God's immutable love and decree of election: since God's love and decree is unchanging, how could the elect perish? (2) The merit and intercession of Christ: Since Christ paid an infinite price for our salvation, and He is constantly interceding for us, how could we perish? (3) The abiding of the Spirit: since we are by the sovereign will of God united with Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit, how could anything cut us off from Christ; and (4) The nature of the Covenant of Grace: Since the covenant of grace is unilateral and unconditional, how could we,-on account of our sin and failures,-perish?

To prove the doctrine of the Perseverance of the saints, we need only to prove these 4 propositions as given in the *WCF*. But let's begin with some clear statements from the Scriptures which asserts that none who are in Christ will perish.

### ***Clear Scriptural Affirmations***

Perhaps the most precious statement with regards to our perseverance as saints comes from the lips of our Lord, the “Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2) Himself, for concerning the sheep for whom He laid down His life for (Jn 10:15), He says: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (Jn 10:28). Three times in this one statement, does the Lord assure us that those who are in Him will never perish: First, He gives us eternal life, which is not only a life of communion with God (Jn 17:3), but is as the word ‘eternal’ (*aiônios, aijwvniô*”) suggests, an everlasting life. Second, He assures us that we shall never perish or be destroyed or to fall irrecoverably (*apollumi, ajpovllumi*). But in case someone thinks that if we cannot fall by ourselves, it does not mean that the enemies of God cannot destroy us, the Lord assures us, thirdly, that no one will be able to pluck or snatch (*arpazô, aJrpavzw*) us out of His hand. What an encouraging thought! He who is the Sovereign God is holding us in His strong hands, how can we ever perish?

The apostle Paul was essentially echoing this thought in his famous and beautiful statement:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:35-39).

Notice how Paul’s statement speaks about our perseverance and not just our preservation, for he tells us that “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” In other words, Christ preserves us by making us victors over all that may tempted us to fall away.

What about professing Christians who apostatise? Do they not prove that the doctrine is wrong of that we have misinterpreted both the Lord and the apostle Paul? Well, we must always interpret experience with the Scripture and not the other way round. This is particularly so in the case of the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, for here we have the apostle John writing under inspiration asserting that any who apostatise have never been a Christian in the first place: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 Jn 2:19).

### ***God's Immutable Love & Decree***

We have already previously seen how the apostle Paul asserts in Romans 8:29-30 that those foreknown or elected by God (cf. 2 Tim 2:19) will, with certainty, attain unto glorification. This is because God’s decree to save the elect is unchangeable. If it were in any sense changeable, the apostle Paul could not have spoke so definitively.

The election of the saints by God is according to the “good pleasure of His will”, and His predestination of the saints is founded upon His eternal love of for them in Christ (Eph 1:4). This is the same love that Jehovah expressed to His saints of old through Jeremiah: “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). Notice how the Lord speaks of His love as being ‘everlasting.’ This means that He will never cease to love His elect. His love for them is unchanging. When the elect of God sin against Him, they incur His Fatherly displeasure, this wrath is for them but for a moment (Ps 30:5). It never impinges on the love of God for them. And since the final destiny of man is entirely determined by the will of God, we know for certain that those whom God loves will never perish.

### ***Merit & Intercession of Christ***

We have already seen that Christ’s atonement for the elect was not to make salvation possible for them but to save them. The apostle to the Hebrews make this point when he says: “...we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:10, 14; cf. Heb 13:20-21; 9:12-15; Rom 8:33-39). Notice the language of completion and permanence in the phrase: “He hath perfected for ever.” This, certainly does not leave any room for the possibility of a fall from grace. A fall from grace would not only mean that the atonement of Christ is neither perfect nor sufficient, but would also imply that God’s Word is unreliable.

Christ, furthermore did not just suffer and die for the saints. He rose from the dead and is ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. There, He is interceding, as He did before His death, for His saints whom the Father had given Him (Jn 17:11, 24). It is through this intercessory work of Christ, that He preserves us to the very end, for we read: “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). We have an idea of how the Lord intercedes for us in his words to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...” (Lk 22:31-32). The Lord is praying for us that our faith fail not, and His prayers are always efficacious.

### *Abiding of the Spirit*

We have seen the perseverance of the saints on basis of the work of the Father and of the Son, it is not surprising therefore to read that the Spirit is involved in our perseverance too. The Lord indicates this when He tells us that the Holy Spirit, the other Comforter, will abide with us forever (Jn 14:16). Similarly the apostle John tells us that as the Spirit abides in us, we shall abide in Him” (1 Jn 2:27; cf. 1 Jn 3:9). Indeed, the Christian perseveres because the Spirit or the Seed of God remains in him to work efficaciously in his heart (1 Jn 3:9), so that he cannot fall habitually, finally and totally into sin.

### *Nature of the Covenant of Grace*

The Covenant of Grace is most beautifully displayed in Genesis 15 where God in a theophany passed through the severed pieces of animals to indicate that His covenant with the seed of Abraham is unilateral, unconditional and everlasting (cf. Heb 6:13-20; Gal 3:16, 29; see *PCC Bulletin*, vol. 1 issue 9, dated 29 Aug 1999).

Elsewhere the same thought concerning the everlasting nature of the covenant is repeated, e.g.: “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer 32:40); “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:10).

This covenant, we must remember is not made with the Jews as a nation, but with the Jews as the covenant people of God; and the covenant respects our eternal inheritance in Christ rather than the land of Palestine, which is but a shadow and type. And since it is everlasting and unconditional, it follows that none of those who are the elect or the children of the promise (Rom 9:8) can either fail to be saved, or fall away ultimately.

### **Conclusion**

We have, I believe, proven beyond a doubt that the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saint is sound theologically and biblically. The Arminian vacillation on the doctrine is largely due to their errors respecting the election of God, the atonement of Christ and the efficacious call of the Spirit. Logically, from their theological propositions in these areas, they ought to be very ready to reject perseverance altogether. However, it seems rather impossible to deny or re-interpret that Scriptural assertions of preservation and perseverance. Perhaps this is why the Arminius and the Remonstrants were not prepared to put their feet down to say that it is definitely possible to fall from grace. Nevertheless, later Arminians such as the Wesleyans insisted on the possibility.

Does the doctrine of perseverance mean that the Christian can live any way he chooses and yet persevere all the way to glorification? Not at all! Those who understand this doctrine will know that anyone who live in disregard to the Word of God is simply not a Christian in the first place. This is why the apostle Paul teaches us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12), and the apostle Peter reminds us “to give diligence to make our calling and election sure” (1 Pet 1:10-11). And indeed, if we are truly Christ's elect, we will do so, for we will be led by the Spirit of Christ. Then as we make use the means of grace, we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). We will behold the face of Christ in this way, and the Spirit who illumines our hearts will change us into the same image from glory to glory until the day when we shall be like Him, when we shall see Him as He is (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Jn 3:2). Amen.

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# PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CALVINISM

We have been looking at the five points of Calvinism, or the biblical doctrine of salvation as taught by John Calvin. This was crystallised in the Canons of Dort in 1618, and then beautifully arranged by English theologians according to the acronym TULIP. Providentially, the tulip is generally regarded as the national flower of Holland! Today, these *five points* are so identified with Calvin that the term Calvinism is often taken to be synonymous with the *five points*. Indeed, many will identify themselves as Calvinists because they agree with these points. This is despite the fact that Calvin taught much more than can be summarised in five points (see for e.g., Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough? Ten Points of Calvinism* [n.p., 1980]). Ironically, many who profess to be Calvinistic on the basis of the five points actually differ from Calvin in numerous areas such as in worship, church government, sacraments, eschatology, etc. If only more will pay careful attention to what Calvin has to say in these areas, the church would be much stronger and consistent today than it is. But even with all the general apathy and ignorance about what Calvin taught, the impact of what has percolated through Calvin's thinking and teaching upon the modern world is unmistakable.

The practical implication of Calvinism is amazingly broad. But naturally, as we are studying the *five points*, we shall have to restrict ourselves to the implications pertaining to them. These implications, as we shall see, are far-reaching and life-transforming when understood correctly.

Theology, we must remember, is never intended to simply enlarge our minds or make us great debaters. The apostle Paul, after writing 11 chapters of theology in the epistle to the Romans, most succinctly summarises the purpose of knowing theology:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but *be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom 12:1-2).

In other words, the knowledge of theology ought to renew our minds for the purpose of transforming our lives. If our lives are not transformed, then our knowledge would not only be vain and unfruitful, but would actually condemn us: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lk 12:48).

Many of us, I believe, have on occasions come across individuals who are able to defend Calvinism so logically and eloquently that we cannot help but detect a tinge of pride in their tone as they cut down their opponents. If indeed pride is involved, such individuals would be living contradictions, for a proud Calvinist is a contradiction of terms. But more than that, often these same individuals are observed to manifest gross inconsistencies and compromises in their lives. I am not sure if anyone who reads this article thinks that I am referring to him or her, but there is really no need to speculate. If you consider yourself a Calvinist, and you feel indignation rising in your heart because you suspect that I may be pointing at you, then you may know that I am speaking to you. But in any case, all of us need to be warned against the increase of knowledge without any concurrent increase in piety.

With this in mind, let us consider how the knowledge of the five points of Calvinism ought to transform our lives.

## **Humility, Humility, Humility**

The doctrine of Calvinism,-which exalts the holiness, glory and sovereignty of God, while debasing the ability, freedom and righteousness of man,-ought, first of all, to humble us to the dust. It is not surprising that the Christian virtue that Calvin himself and his theological progenitor Augustine found to be most valuable and to be most fervently cultivated is that of humility. Calvin avers:

I have always been exceedingly delighted with the words of Chrysostom, "The foundation of our philosophy is humility;" and still more with those of Augustine, "As the orator, when asked, What is the first precept in eloquence? answered, Delivery: What is the second? Delivery: What is the third? Delivery: so, if you ask me in regard to the precepts of the Christian Religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, Humility." By humility he means not when a man, with a consciousness of some virtue, refrains from pride, but when he truly feels that he has no refuge but in humility (*JCR* 2.2.11).

The true Calvinist ought to be the humblest of men, for a proper understanding of Calvinism is one of the most effective antidotes to pride. Calvinism kills pride because it shows us how deserving we are of eternal damnation and how powerless we are to save ourselves. The man who truly understands Calvinism does not charge God for unfairness that He has chosen to save only a few to be saved (cf. Rom 9:14ff). He is amazed that God would even show mercy to any of us sinful creatures at the expense of the infinite suffering of Christ; and he is humbly overwhelmed by why God should spare him and love him. In his astonishment, he does not ask: "Why dost Thou not save all?" Instead he asks "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps 8:4)

The Calvinist, furthermore, knows that the only reason he does not break out into gross immorality and rebellion against God is because the hand of Christ is upholding him. He is, as such, distrustful of himself. He constantly looks to Christ the author and finisher of his faith for guidance and help (Heb 12:2). He has little difficulty esteeming others better than himself (Phil 2:3). He is acutely aware of his own depravity, and therefore poignantly and honestly acknowledges the beam in his own eyes (Mt 7:3). And he nurtures a forgiving spirit because he knows how undeserving he is of God's forgiveness (Eph 4:32).

### **Honest Scriptural Self-Examination & Assurance of Faith**

Secondly, a proper understanding of Calvinism, far from making us fatalistic, ought to drive out the complacency and presumption in our hearts with regard to our own spiritual state. It ought to encourage us to take heed to the apostle Paul's admonition: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5).

The five points can actually provoke self-reflection in this regard. For example, when we consider the doctrine of Total Depravity and Irresistible Grace (Efficacious Grace) together, we see that one who is not sovereignly regenerated by Christ cannot possibly be a Christian, for he is dead in sin and cannot see the kingdom of God (Eph 2:1; Jn 3:3). The Calvinist contemplating on this truth realises the possibility that he may actually be dead in sin and so deluded about his faith. And so he seeks earnestly and honestly to examine himself according to Paul's instruction.

Similarly, when we consider the doctrine of Unconditional Election and Perseverance of the Saints together, we see that those who persevere in the faith may have the assurance that they are the elect.

But it may be asked: "How do I know that I am not fooling myself? I could, after all, be striving to enter the strait gate (Lk 13:24) and walking in the narrow way (Mt 7:14) by my own effort?"

Well, this is possible, but we must remember that perseverance is not only about doing things. It is about loving Christ, obeying Him out of love and reverence, not out of fear or mere duty. The apostle John tells us how we may know if we truly love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn 5:3). If you can honestly say that it is not burdensome for you to keep the commandments of the Lord and that you are keeping them out of love for Christ (Jn 14:15), then you can have the assurance that God has "begun a good work in you and will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). In which case, you need not fear that you are fooling yourself, nor need you worry that you will fall, for the apostle Peter says: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet 1:10).

Bear in mind that morbid doubt is often a manifestation of distrust. We must indeed have a certain distrust of our own honesty in self-examination, but we must not doubt God's Word that we will not fall finally and ultimately if we give diligence to make our calling and election sure. Indeed, unlike Arminians, Calvinists have the confidence that whenever they fall, Christ will lift them up: "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief" (Prov 24:16).

### **Hatred for Sin & Gratitude to Christ**

The Calvinist, thirdly, understands the sinfulness of sin and hates sin, especially his own sin. Thus, the Calvinist is filled with gratitude to Christ for His deliverance from the bondage and guilt of sin.

This is especially as he contemplates on the doctrine of the Limited Atonement of Christ, for Christ suffered and died to save His elect. He had to suffer and die to save us because we have incurred the wrath of God on account of our sin. Sin is so hateful to God that He sent His son to take on our flesh to suffer and die for it so that sinners may be reconciled to God.

At the Cross of Calvary, there was a double imputation. It was an unfair exchange of infinite magnitude, for there on the Cross was the guilt of all the sin of the elect of God throughout the ages heaped upon Christ, while, on the other hand, the righteousness of Christ was imputed on all of them.

The Calvinist understands this fact. His heart is therefore filled with gratitude to the Lord. He knows that from beginning to end, his salvation is of the Lord. At the same time, He knows that Christ died on account of his sin, and that He had to die because sin is hateful to the thrice holy, triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Calvinist therefore mourns for his own sin, knowing that the Spirit who indwells him hates sin. This leads us to our fourth point.

## **Holiness: The Inexorable Goal of True Calvinism**

The doctrine of Calvinism spurs us unto holiness. Amazingly, we can see in Scripture a connection between every of the five points of Calvinism and goal of holiness in the saints.

First, we must recall the account when the Lord commanded Peter to launch out and to lower the net for a draught. Peter was amazed at how many fishes the net brought and he saw for the first time the glory and majesty of Christ. He knew that he was standing before the thrice holy God, and feeling naked on account of his sin, he fell at the Lord's knees, saying: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8). To be sure, in this statement, Peter speaks about his own utter depravity and says nothing about him being motivated to holiness. But consider the fact that there cannot be progress in sanctification except that the saint knows how far short he is of the holiness of God, and we can be quite sure that this discovery of his own depravity would have spurred Peter in a quest for holiness. I am persuaded that it is for this reason that Peter, among all the other apostles, was chosen to remind the New Testament church of the call of God "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).

Secondly, the doctrine of election also finds its fruition in holiness. This is made clear by the apostle Paul when he says: "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" (Eph 1:4). The saints are elected to be holy and without blame. A Calvinist who is not pursuing holiness by the grace of God either does not understand the doctrine of election or is a living contradiction.

Thirdly, the particular atonement of Christ on behalf of the elect is also for the purpose of gathering a holy people unto Himself: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and *purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*" (Tit 2:14). How then can one who defends Limited Atonement live in sin and without regard to the holiness of God?

Fourthly, it is clear also that one of the effects of the efficacious call of the Gospel is holiness. Paul says: "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Th 4:7). A person who is truly a Calvinist not just in thought but in heart will know that if his life remains unchanged or is characterised by uncleanness, then he is in all probability yet in the state of nature.

Finally, the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints must go hand in hand with sanctification. The Calvinist knows that God does not preserve sinners in the way of life. He knows that a professing believer whose life is not transformed will be in for a rude shock at the day of judgement, for the writer of Hebrews has admonished: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

### **Hope in Prayer & Witnessing**

The final implication of Calvinism directly answers the charges of the Arminians that Calvinism destroys hope in prayer and discourages evangelism.

In the first place, the Calvinist understands that salvation is the work of the Lord from beginning to end. He knows that without the Lord's help he cannot grow in sanctification. He knows that all his attendance to, and use of the means of grace is of no value unless the Holy Spirit makes them effectual unto him for salvation. Therefore, he cries importunately to the Lord for his help. He knows that the Lord will hear his prayer because his sanctification is the will of God (1 Th 4:3). And he knows that God will answer any plea of His children that is in consonant with His will (1 Jn 5:14) and are offered in the name of Christ.

Similarly, the Calvinist is also encouraged to pray for the unconverted. He not only knows that he must only pray according to the will of God, but he knows that the apostle John is referring to the Revealed Will of God and not the eternal counsel of God (Dt 29:29). He knows that although God does not reveal who is elect and who is not, it is His Revealed Will that sinners repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he is encouraged to pray that God would do so for his unconverted loved ones. He knows that God alone has the prerogative to answer his prayer according to His good pleasure, but he is encouraged to pray because he knows that if his loved ones were to be converted, it cannot be by their own efforts, but by the grace and power of God.

In the second place, the Calvinist is encouraged to witness for the Lord, and the Calvinistic church is encouraged to continue in the work of evangelism through the preaching of the Gospel, because these are the means that God has appointed to gather His elect. The Arminians may get discouraged when they see little result to their efforts at 'sharing the Gospel.' The Calvinist knows that God alone can make effectual our feeble efforts, and that because He has His elect whom Christ died for, these will definitely be soundly converted. So the Calvinist prays that God may bless his and his church's efforts and that they may be instruments in the Lord's hands.

In the same way, the Calvinistic church continues to preach the Gospel each week even though she sees little result because she knows that though preaching is her business (2 Tim 4:2), conversion is not her business. She is not

tempted to introduce worldly innovations to attract the crowds because she knows that false conversions can easily result from these methods. She, moreover, knows that the regenerate needs to hear the Gospel too, for we are so prone to wander and prone to forget our need of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Calvinism is not cold and intellectual as many suppose. It is about knowing the God of the Bible and living *Coram Deo* (before the face of God). Calvinism is simply a synonym for Biblicalism systematised. Calvinism alone leads to true biblical Christianity.

Dr John Gerstner has succinctly summarised the situation in Christendom today when he says:

There have been essentially only three theologies in the history of the church. One is usually called Augustinian, Calvinistic, or Reformed. The second is called Semi-Pelagian, Arminian, or (often) evangelical. The third is called Pelagian, Socinian, or liberal (modernist).

Only the first two (Calvinistic and Arminian) can qualify for the terms Christian or Biblical. Calvinism is consistent Christianity and Arminianism is inconsistent Christianity, while Pelagianism or liberalism (anti-supernaturalism) is not Christianity at all but a counterfeit that has fooled a significant portion of the church in the modern period (*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. [SDG, 2000], 113).

While we may charitably regard Arminianism as being inconsistent Christianity, we must warn that it is a short step from Arminianism to Pelagianism. We think of how the humanistic techniques of Charles G. Finney are widely employed in evangelical churches today. Finney was a Pelagian. His methods were intentionally designed to create conversion and revival! We think of how a very great part of Lutheranism and Methodism which were largely Arminian is today Unitarian. Arminianism is inconsistent and unstable because it is a compromise between humanism and theism. Who would want such a compromise but one who is uncomfortable with the theism of the Bible which reveals a sovereign and holy God who punishes sin in His infinite wrath. It is no wonder, then, that Arminian churches often settle into unbelieving churches.

Have there not been defections in the Calvinistic camp too? No doubt there have been, but history has shown that such defections often begin with the inroads of Arminianism and Pelagianism. May the Lord protect us from such a downward slide!

Confident that Christ will continue to build His Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18), we will continue to preach and live according to the old paths as revealed in His word and delivered unto the saints, which path is also known as Calvinism. Amen. *W*

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