

THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

Address given by Mr Clifford Parsons

The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. John 10:11

And I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:15

Introduction

I have been asked to speak on the subject of “The Five Points of Calvinism,” sometimes referred to as “the doctrines of grace,” and I was only too pleased to accept the invitation. And I was pleased to accept the invitation for a number of reasons:

i) Firstly, because these doctrines have had a profound effect upon me personally. These doctrines revolutionised my Christian experience and my understanding of the gospel. When the Lord called me by his grace, I was amongst the Charismatics. In my Arminian zeal I joined the London City Mission and it was while I was with the London City Mission that I came to the doctrines of grace or, rather, the doctrines of grace came to me. The Charismatics like to talk of their “second blessing.” Well, for me, this was my second blessing, when I came to see all the errors of the Charismatic Movement, the delusions of the Charismatic Movement, and of Arminianism, and the doctrines of grace were written, as it were, with indelible ink in my heart and in my soul.

ii) Secondly, as the Lord has brought me amongst the Strict and Particular Baptists, I have discovered that there are not a few who have never heard, or have never heard of, these doctrines – particularly amongst the younger generation. Which brings me to . . .

iii) The third reason, and that is that I believe these doctrines should be widely known. They really are the doctrines of the gospel. The five points of Calvinism are, if you like, a summary of the gospel. They are a miniature body of divinity. You may have seen those thick volumes such as Louis Berkhoff's *Systematic Theology* or Dr. Gill's *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* – these tremendous tomes. Well, here in the Five Points of Calvinism you have a simple, and yet profound, system of theology – a body of divinity in miniature.

By way of introduction, I would briefly consider with you the historical background to the five points, how they arose. Then, if the Lord will, we shall consider each of the five points in turn. And then, by way of conclusion, we shall consider some of the practical implications of these doctrines, both with regards to ourselves personally and with regards to the preaching of the gospel.

So where do the five points of Calvinism come from? Well they are really an answer to the five points of Arminianism. Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian who died in 1609. In the following year, 1610, his followers, the Arminians, formulated Arminius's teachings into five points and they presented their five points to the Dutch Parliament as a Remonstrance or protest. Hence the Arminians were also referred to as Remonstrants. The Dutch churches responded with the seven articles of the Counter-Remonstrance of 1611 and then subsequently with the five heads of doctrine of the Canons of Dort in 1619. The seven articles of the Counter-Remonstrance equates very closely to what we now know as the Five Points of Calvinism; and the Synod of Dort in 1619 re-affirmed those doctrines, and they came out against the Arminians.

What were the Arminians teaching? Well, they were teaching:

- i) That although man is fallen, he is not altogether incapable of choosing good. He can therefore, by an act of the will, turn to God and he can believe the gospel and be saved.
- ii) That God foresees who would believe and so he chooses them. Election is therefore conditional.
- iii) That Christ died to save all men; that the death of Christ for all men has put them in a salvable state; God is able to pardon all, on condition that they believe, because Christ has died for all. The atonement is universal.

- iv) That the Holy Spirit is striving with men, but men are able to resist his grace, and those who resist the strivings of the Spirit ultimately perish in their sin. Grace is therefore resistible.
- v) That those who are genuinely converted, being born again of the Spirit of God, are yet able to fall from grace and lose their salvation.

These doctrines, as we shall see, are directly opposite to the five points of Calvinism.

And then in 1649, there were the five Geneva Theses; and these five theses, or heads of doctrine, were again very close to what we now know as the five points of Calvinism. They were actually drawn up in opposition to another sect that arose in the 17th century, that of the Amyraldians. Now Moses Amyraut and his followers taught a hypothetical universal atonement – that Christ died for all hypothetically but the benefits of redemption are only enjoyed by the elect. They taught, like the Arminians, that God loves everybody and has a sincere desire to save everybody. There are two wills in the Godhead, they said: there is his secret will to save only the elect and there is his revealed will which is that all should be saved. Salvation or grace, then, is sincerely offered to all if only they would believe. The Geneva Theses of 1649 were against that teaching, as are the five points of Calvinism.

So what are the five points of Calvinism? Well, they are easily remembered using the simple mnemonic or acrostic, TULIP. The T in TULIP stands for Total Depravity; the U stands for Unconditional Election; the L stands for Limited Atonement; the I stands for Irresistible Grace; and the P stands for the Perseverance of the Saints.

The earliest known reference to TULIP is around 1905 when it was used by an American Presbyterian minister and theologian by the name of Cleland Boyd McAfee.

But why are these doctrines called “the Five Points of Calvinism?” Well, the term “Calvinism” is really a label of convenience. The Arminians were opposing the doctrines taught by the Reformers. These five points are a re-stating and a clarifying of the doctrine of the Reformers, among whom John Calvin was pre-eminent. Hence they are called the Five Points of Calvinism.

Before we go on to consider each point individually, we should remember that these doctrines are all of a piece. If one point is taken away, then they all collapse. Dr. Loraine Boettner puts it like this:

“...these are not isolated and independent doctrines but are so inter-related that they form a simple, harmonious, self-consistent system; and the way in which they fit together as component parts of a well-ordered whole has won the admiration of thinking men of all creeds. Prove any one of them true and all the others will follow as logical and necessary parts of the system. Prove any one of them false and the whole system must be abandoned. They are found to dovetail perfectly one into the other. They are so many links in the great chain of causes, and not one of them can be taken away without marring and subverting the whole Gospel plan of salvation through Christ.”

And that, really, is what we have here in The Five Points of Calvinism – “the whole Gospel plan of salvation through Christ.”

Let us start with the T of TULIP . . .

I. Total Depravity

This doctrine is foundational. This doctrine is the foundation of all the doctrines which follow. Any misunderstanding of this doctrine, any error regarding this doctrine, will lead to a misunderstanding of all the doctrines which follow and will lead to error regarding the whole scheme of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of Total Depravity refers to the state of man since the fall of our first parents. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. They were perfect – physically, spiritually and morally. But you know the historical record as we have it in Genesis chapter 3, how they sinned against their Creator. They disobeyed the commandment that was given to them. *Lo, this only have I found [says Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes (7:29)], that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.* They sought out many ways to transgress. All those who are the natural descendants of Adam, who is the head of the race, have the same nature as Adam – that is all of us here. *And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image,* we read in chapter 5 (v. 3) of Genesis. And what is that nature? What is this nature that we have inherited from Adam? Why, it is a sinful nature. And so all of us, who are descended from Adam, are by nature transgressors of the law of God, even as Adam was. *The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies,* we read in the Psalms (58:3). David confesses (Ps. 51:5), *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

The spring was polluted at the head and so the whole river became polluted. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,* Paul says in Romans (5:12). And man is, by nature, estranged from God because of his sin. *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none (now mark these words – there is none) that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.* (Isaiah 64:6.)

The question is, how far has man fallen from God? The Arminians would say that man is not so far fallen that he is not able to turn to God and seek his grace. And those who do thus turn to God, God gives them his grace. But the real doctrines of grace and the doctrines of real grace teach us that man has completely fallen away from God, that his depravity is total. There is no will in him to turn to God – for his will, as well as everything else in him, is affected by sin. The scriptures speak of us as being *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1) and *dead in sins* (Eph. 2:5). Remember what was said to Adam in the very beginning (Gen. 2:7), *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

By nature we are spiritually dead, dead towards God, *dead in trespasses and sins*. The natural language of our sinful hearts is, *Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways* (Job 21:14). We are, by nature, dead towards God. And what can a dead man do? Absolutely nothing! That is why the scripture says (Jon. 2:9), *Salvation is of the LORD.*

This brings us to the second point, the U in TULIP . . .

II. Unconditional Election

The doctrine of election is written, of course, all through the scriptures. The children of Israel were chosen over other nations. *For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.* (Deut. 7:6.) The gospel church is made up of a chosen people. Peter writes in his first epistle (2:9) to Gentile believers and he says, *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* And throughout the New Testament, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are referred to as *the elect*. *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?* (Luke 18:7.) *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* (Rom. 8:33.) And so on. The Lord Jesus chose his disciples. *Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* he said, referring to Judas Iscariot. We read of *the elect angels* (1 Tim. 5:21) as opposed to *the angels that sinned* (2 Pet. 2:4). Even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the head of the church, is spoken of as being elect. It was prophesied of Christ in Psalm 89 (vv. 3,19), *I have made a covenant with my chosen;* and again in that psalm, *Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted*

one chosen out of the people. Isaiah (42:1) prophesied of him, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*

Christ was chosen and all his people were chosen in him. *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,* Paul says in Ephesians (1:3-4). The Lord Jesus, throughout his earthly ministry, repeatedly spoke of those whom the Father had given to him. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me* (John 6:37). They were given to Christ in the eternal covenant of grace, the covenant that was made even before the world itself was made. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*

Now, the question is this: On what basis did God choose his people? Was it, as the Arminians would have it, that God foresaw who would believe, he foresaw who would repent, he foresaw who would turn to God? No. Regarding Israel of old, it was written, *The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you* (Deut. 7:7). Israel was loved, Israel was chosen, not because of anything in them, but simply because the Lord would love them. So it is written in the New Testament. Paul, in Romans chapter 9 (vv. 11-13), speaks of Jacob and Esau and he says, *(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. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* If election were based on any foreseen good in the sinner, then that would mean salvation would be by works. But the scripture says that it is *Not of works, lest any man should boast* (Eph. 2:9). The doctrine of Unconditional Election completely tears down and roots up all works of religion – *that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.* God did not choose his people on the basis of any foreseen faith for it is God himself who gives them the faith to believe the gospel. *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.)

Now it is true that the scriptures do speak of God's foreknowledge of his people. But it is a foreknowledge not of their works, nor even of their faith; it is a foreknowledge of their persons. Paul writes in Romans, *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son* (Rom. 8:29). Peter writes in his first epistle, *to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 1:1-2). You see, they were chosen, according to God's foreknowledge of them, *unto obedience*, not because of obedience. Their obedience to the gospel was a consequence of their being foreknown of God and of their being chosen unconditionally by him – as was their being sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Which brings us to our third point, the L in TULIP . . .

III. Limited Atonement

This third point is, of course, at the very the centre of the five points of Calvinism which is very appropriate because the death of Christ, atonement made for sin by the blood of the Redeemer, is at the very heart of the gospel. It's also the most controversial. If there is any of these doctrines which is particularly hated, it has to be this doctrine. But the question is, for whom did Christ die? Did he die for all men, as the Arminians and the Amyraldians say, or did he die for a particular people?

Well, firstly we need to understand why Christ died. The scriptures tell us that he offered up his life to make an atonement for sin. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,* Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:3). Now, the death of Christ was both penal and substitutionary. Isaiah (53:8) says, *for the transgression of my people was he stricken.* There is the penal aspect of the sufferings of Christ. It was for transgression. He suffered

the punishment that was due to sin which is death, though he himself was without sin. That is the penal aspect of the sufferings of Christ. But there is also the substitutionary aspect to his great sacrifice. It was *for the transgression of my people*. He died in the place of transgressors of the law of God. He died the death, He endured the punishment that was due to others – He took their place. In the gospels (Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45), the Lord tells us that *the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*. The word *for* in the original Greek is *αντι* (anti) which means “in the place of.” The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom in the place of many. Now, the Vicar of Christ is a substitute Christ; he takes the place of Christ; he is Antichrist. And so the death of Christ is often referred to as being vicarious, substitutionary. The sacrifice of Christ was both penal and substitutionary.

Those who say that Christ has died for everyone do not really understand the doctrine of the atonement and they are denying the efficacy of the death of Christ. They are saying that His death did not make satisfaction for sin. They are saying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross did not really atone for sin because there are those who are going to suffer eternal punishment in hell and yet Christ has died for them! At best, the death of Christ was a possible atonement. This is why the doctrine of Limited Atonement is also spoken of as a definite atonement. Those for whom Christ died can never suffer punishment in hell because Christ has actually born the punishment for their sins in his own body on the tree as their divinely appointed substitute.

It is also sometimes called Particular Redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed a particular people – those whom the Father has chosen and given to him in the eternal covenant of grace.

But does this doctrine agree with the scriptures? Yes it does. We have already mentioned Matthew and Mark, *the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*. And Isaiah says, *for the transgression of my people was he stricken*. Isaiah also says in that 53rd chapter (v. 11), *by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities*. And again (v. 12), *he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*. At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel (1:21) we read, *and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*. At the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Lord refers to the cup and He says, *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* (Matt. 26:28). Paul, in Ephesians (5:25), says that *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*. You know, the Arminian would make Christ an adulterer, for they say that he has loved the Whore of Babylon, the false church, as well as his own bride, the true church. The Lord Jesus Christ says nothing about laying down his life for the goats. *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*, he says (John 10:11). The Lord tells us exactly who he died for; and lest there should be any doubt he repeats it (John 10:15), *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep*. There is no doubt about it, mark those words, *I lay down my life for the sheep*. That scripture alone is enough to overthrow the doctrine of a universal redemption. But there is just one more scripture that I would mention – Revelation 14 verse 4, *These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*. If there are those who are *redeemed from among men*, then it is clear that not all men were redeemed. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus, redemption through his blood, is not universal, indefinite or hypothetical. It is particular and definite. It is a Limited Atonement – limited exclusively to the elect of God.

But what of those scriptures which speak of “the world” and “all” and “all men?” John 3:16 for example. This is the one that is constantly thrown at us in our discussions with Arminians. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. I do not see in these words any universal redemption or unlimited, general atonement. These words say nothing about Christ laying down his life for all the men, women and children who have ever lived or who ever shall live on the face of this earth. The term *the world* is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament scriptures. It can refer to the whole of the created universe as, for example, in John 1 verse 10: *He was in the world, and the world was made by him*. It can refer to the Roman world, as in

Luke 2 verse 1: *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.* Now, they weren't taxed in China at that time, at least by the Romans. In Romans 11 we see the term used exclusively of the Gentiles. Sometimes *the world* refers to the wicked who are in the world. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* (1 John 3:13.) Sometimes it can refer to time or to eternity. We read in the scriptures of *this present world* and of *the world to come*. Here in John 3:16, *For God so loved the world*, it certainly cannot be referring to every single person who has ever lived or who shall live because there is at least one man of whom it is stated that God did not love him. The scripture (Rom. 9:13) declares, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* The love of God is particular and it is expressed in the atonement. If you want an inspired commentary on the words *the world* there in John 3:16 in order to find out what they really mean, I would direct you to Revelation 5 verse 9: *for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.* There is the world that God has loved – not all of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; but those out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Similar remarks might be made regarding the use of the words “all” and “all men.” You really need to look at the context in order to ascertain the correct meaning of the words. It is simply not good enough to wrench a verse out of context, interpret it in a superficial manner and then use it as pretext for undermining the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I've heard them and I'm sure some of you have heard them too, “Jesus has done his part, now it's up to you!” No. The Lord Jesus Christ has done it all. He has secured once and for all the everlasting salvation of his elect people.

Complete atonement thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate'er thy people owed;
How then can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with thy blood?

If thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

We have considered in the second and third points, albeit briefly, the role of the Father in the great scheme of salvation – that he has elected a certain people; and the role of the Son – that he has redeemed that elect people.

We come now to the fourth point and to the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of God's elect – the I of TULIP . . .

IV. Irresistible Grace

How is it that those who are chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Son come into the knowledge and experience of their salvation? Well, it is by the gracious, sovereign operations of the [Holy] Spirit of God in their hearts and in their souls.

Remember what we said earlier about the teaching of the Arminians regarding God's grace – that it is resistible. The Holy Spirit strives with men but men are able to resist his grace, and those who resist are the ones who ultimately perish in their sin. Christ has died for all; and salvation, God's grace, is offered to all; and it is the duty of all to savingly repent and believe. You see, they err at the very first point. They do not understand that the will of man is in complete bondage to sin. And so they err in every subsequent point of doctrine. Man cannot, by an act of his own will, “co-operate” with God that he might be saved.

As Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews (John 5:40), *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*

What is needed is an act of invincible and efficacious grace. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power* (Ps. 110:3). See how the Arminians denigrate the Holy Ghost. Why, puny man is able to resist the omnipotent Spirit of God! No, says the Bible. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.*

In the new birth, of which the Holy Ghost is the sole author, a gracious change is wrought. There is a quickening – that is, a making alive. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1). It is the same power that raised the Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead. Paul, there in Ephesians (1:19-20), speaks of *the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.* It is the same power which raised Christ from the dead that makes a real Christian.

This doctrine, Irresistible Grace, is also called “Effectual Calling.” The elect sinner, unable and unwilling to save himself, is called effectually out of the grave of trespasses and sins – just as Lazarus was called out of the tomb by the omnipotent voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes* (John 11:43-44). So it must be with the sinner dead in trespasses and sins. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1). What did contribution did Lazarus make to his deliverance? None. And neither can we. Was Lazarus able to resist Christ's command to *come forth*? Could Lazarus resist Christ's commanding voice? No. Neither can we. *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ* (1 John 3:22). That commandment is of the same power as that which said, *Let there be light* (Gen. 1:3). *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (2 Cor. 4:6.)

Was the creation able to resist being created? Neither is a new creature, a new creation, able to resist being created anew. Does any child have a choice as to whether he is born or not? What choice did you have in your natural birth? None - neither does a child of God – *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1:13). Is any child able to resist being born? Neither is the child of God able to resist the grace which gives him a new birth and new life. *And I know that his commandment is life everlasting* (John 12:50).

Which brings us to our fifth point – the P of TULIP . . .

V. Perseverance of the Saints

What is a saint? A saint is one who is sanctified, or set apart. And the sanctification of the Lord's people is threefold. They are sanctified or set apart by the electing love of the Father; they are sanctified or set apart by the blood of Christ which was shed for them; they are sanctified or set apart by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. All those who are thus sanctified – being chosen of the Father, redeemed by the Son and regenerated by the Holy Ghost – must and shall be everlastingly saved.

The love of the Father is unchangeable. *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* (Jer. 31:3.) The blood of the Son can never lose its power. *And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* (1 John 1:7.) And the Holy Spirit will never stop working in the hearts of those whom he indwells. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:6).

The child of God may fall into sin; he may backslide; but nevertheless, in spite of all the opposition from the world, in spite of all the power and strength of indwelling sin, in spite of all the temptations of the devil, the child of God shall be brought to the state of eternal happiness in heaven. Peter says in his First Epistle (1:4-5) that the elect of God are begotten again *To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* The Lord Jesus, in John chapter 10 (vv. 28-29), speaks

of his sheep who are given to him by the Father and for whom he laid down his life: *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* You know the 23rd Psalm (vv. 1-3) begins, *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* And it concludes (v. 6), *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.* That is the Perseverance of the Saints! Sometimes called, the “Preservation of the Saints.”

And so the Five Points of Calvinism begin with Man's Inability and they end with God's Ability. *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.* (Jude 24-25.)

Well, we have considered each of the five points in turn, albeit very briefly. Much more could have been said. Whole volumes have been written on each one of these five points and I would regard our consideration of them here this morning as but an introduction. As I say, much more could have been said. We simply do not have the time, for instance, to deal with all the objections against these doctrines. But I would like to consider with you, by way of conclusion the practical implications of these five doctrines.

Conclusion: The Practical Implications of The Five Points of Calvinism

And we shall consider them: (i) with regards to ourselves, that is, personally; and (ii) with regards to the preaching of the gospel.

(i) First, personally. We must beware of merely giving an intellectual assent to these doctrines. It is possible to do that. One can know all these doctrines notionally – that is, in the head – and still be lost. It is not enough just to know the doctrines of grace; we need to know the grace of the doctrines. It is only when these truths are sealed to our hearts by the Spirit of God that we can know anything really of the grace of these doctrines.

And when these truths are burned into our hearts by the Spirit of the living God, what an effect is produced! These doctrines humble the sinner to the dust. The Spirit-taught sinner is brought to realise that the salvation of his never-dying soul is completely out of his reach and is completely out of his own power. There is nothing that he can do to save himself; why, he cannot even give himself faith and he cannot of his own self repent. If he is to be saved, it must be by the grace of God alone. He does not deserve salvation and the Lord is not obliged to save him. He begins to seek salvation on his knees. If these doctrines do not bring you to your knees, then these doctrines have not been sealed to your heart by the Spirit of God. The Spirit-taught sinner dares not presume that the Lord will have mercy upon him, or that he is one of God's elect, or that Christ has died for his sins, or that he is truly born again of the Spirit of God. He will examine himself as Paul says (2 Cor. 13:5), *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?* He is deeply suspicious of his own heart, being taught the doctrine of Total Depravity experimentally, that is, in his own heart's experience. He can only look to the Lord Jesus Christ to save him and to keep him; for he cannot be suspicious of him who said (John 6:37), *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

These doctrines deliver us from presumption; they humble us and they make us watchful. And this is the way to a bona fide assurance (a true and real assurance) as opposed to that false assurance which is presumption. *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall* (2 Peter 1:10). That's one thing we need to be aware of, an intellectual assent to these doctrines.

The other thing we have to beware of, of course, is fatalism. The fatalist will use these doctrines as an excuse not to *Seek . . . the LORD while he may be found or call upon him while he is near* (Is. 55:6). He is like the man lying in bed while his house is on fire who says, “If I am to be rescued, I shall be rescued. If I am to perish in the flames, then I shall perish in the flames. I’ll just lie here and wait and see what happens!” He is sleeping *the sleep of death* (Ps. 13:3). The soul that is awakened by divine grace, however, by that same grace, seeing his great danger, he flees from the wrath to come. He lays hold on eternal life. He presses into the kingdom of God. He strives to enter in at the strait gate. He gives diligence to make his calling and his election sure.

These doctrines, when they are received in the heart, will have a profound effect upon all true Christians.

(ii) Secondly, let us consider the practical implications of the Five Points of Calvinism with regards to the preaching of the gospel.

One of the most common objections to the Five Points, when you discuss them with an Arminian, is: “What is the point of preaching then?” Well, it is by the means of the preaching of the gospel that the Lord calls and gathers his dear elect – *it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe* (1 Cor. 1:21). Again, *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. 10:17). You know, the Arminian can have no assurance at all that anyone will be saved when he preaches because it is all dependent on the will of man. We, however, do have that assurance that sinners will be saved through the preaching of the gospel because we know that God has willed the salvation of an elect people from before the foundation of the world and he has declared (Is. 55:11) that his word *shall not return unto him void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*. And so it is written in the book of Acts (13:48), following the preaching of the word of God, *and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*. We have an assurance which the Arminian can never have – that sinners shall be brought to Christ through the preaching of the gospel.

And then there is the question of how the gospel is to be preached. To say to an unbeliever, “God loves you” or “Jesus died for you” is not preaching the gospel. To insist that a sinner must “give his heart to Jesus,” or has to “open his heart and let Jesus in” or “ask Jesus into his life” or “accept Christ” is completely unscriptural. No such terminology is found anywhere in the Bible. And the same may be said regarding “offers of grace” and “offers of salvation” and “offering Christ.” John Wesley was the arch-Arminian of the 18th century; he started a magazine called *The Arminian Magazine*. When he sent Francis Asbury to America, the young man asked him, “What shall I tell them?” and Wesley replied, “Offer them Christ!” Nowadays we hear many so-called Calvinists using the same language. The scriptures nowhere speak of Christ being offered except as a sacrifice to God for the sins of his people. That’s the only offer of Christ there is in the Bible. See how Paul, addressing the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 (vv. 20-21), speaks of how he preached. *I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. And then he says (Acts 20:24-27), *I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*. *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more*. *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men*. *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*. And his charge to the Ephesian elders is to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Particular Redemption!) You see, all these words are used with reference to the preaching of the gospel – to show, to teach, to testify, to preach, to declare, to feed – but there is not one mention of “to offer!” In the entire canon of Scripture there is not one “offer” of salvation to the non-elect or even to the elect.

To say that God sincerely offers salvation even to the reprobate is contrary to the word of God and contrary to the Five Points of Calvinism. How can it be a “sincere offer” when a sinner dead in trespasses and sins is unable to accept such an offer? If the Father sincerely desires the salvation of the reprobate then surely he would have chosen them to salvation and so they would not be reprobates. Are we to imagine that God really offers salvation to those for whom Christ did not die; that he offers them a salvation which Christ

did not procure and accomplish for them; that he offers salvation to, and sincerely desires the salvation of, those whom he will not quicken by his Irresistible Grace? Surely if he “sincerely desired” their salvation then surely he would quicken them!

Likewise the notion of “Duty Faith.” There are those who insist that it is the duty of all men, even the reprobate, to savingly believe the gospel. This is to make faith a work to be performed by the unregenerate in order to be saved. That is the bottom line. It is their duty to do something in order to be saved. That is what they are saying. But the scriptures speak not only of faith in Christ but also of the faith of Christ; that is, the faith which is of him or from him, the faith of which he is the author and the finisher. To insist that it is the duty of all men to savingly believe is contrary to all the Five Points of Calvinism, it is contrary to the gospel and contrary to all the word of God. It is contrary to reason and logic too. Can it really be the duty of those for whom Christ did not die to look to, to believe on, and to trust in and depend upon the blood which was not shed for them? What sort of a gospel is this? What sort of a Calvinism is this? It is a mongrel Calvinism, that's what it is. It's not Re-formed; it's De-formed!

Beware of the mongrel Calvinist! He says he believes in the Five Points of Calvinism but in other doctrines, and in his preaching and in his presentation of the gospel, he denies them.

In conclusion, I would just like to quote from a sermon and let me ask you if you think this is an Arminian or a Calvinist, a Calvinist or an Arminian, who is preaching. “Brothers, sisters, are you going to choose destruction, are you going to stand out against the entreaties of Immanuel, the strivings of the Spirit?” And again from the same sermon: “Sinner, open your heart to Jesus. You would not keep the Queen waiting for admission, or even your landlord. There never was such a thing heard of, as to keep a landlord waiting! You never even kept a friend, a relation, a neighbour, perhaps some of you never kept a poor beggar waiting at your door. And yet you, who have not yet freely embraced Christ, you have been keeping the glorious Immanuel . . . waiting, and waiting, and waiting, at the door of your poor, dark, blinded hearts. Yes, the King of kings, by whom princes reign, has knocked, and knocked and knocked repeatedly, again and again, and the door is still shut. Tonight, he still is standing at the door.” And so on. Now, I don't know about you, but I think that that smacks more of Billy Graham than of John Calvin. It is from a book published by The Banner of Truth – Revival Sermons by William C. Burns. In the same book there is a letter in which he addresses, and I quote, “those . . . who have neither part nor lot in the matter of salvation.” This is how he addresses un-believers, he says this to them, “Oh! dear fellow-sinner, it is high time for you to awake out of sleep! Arise and come to Jesus *now*. He is crying, Come unto me, I will in no wise cast you out. The Father is ready to receive you into his family. The Spirit is striving with you, did you not resist him and grieve him away.” Now, who cannot see that that is contrary to the doctrines of grace, the Five Points of Calvinism?

Not everything that presents itself under the banner of “Calvinism” is real Calvinism. Not everything that presents itself under the banner of “Reformed” stands in the line and in the doctrine of the Reformers.

God grant that we might be found convinced and consistent Calvinists, the Five Points being not just notional speculations which we have merely grasped with our minds and given an intellectual assent to. Rather, may these doctrines grasp us and grip our hearts; for these are the doctrines of the word of God. These doctrines are essentially the gospel itself. These doctrines alone are the doctrines which glorify God and ascribe the salvation of our souls entirely to his grace alone. *Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.* (Ps. 115:1.) Amen.