

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION (IV)

### — THE DUTCH MOVEMENT —

“All the Reformers were originally Augustinians, that is, believers in the total depravity of man’s nature, and the absolute sovereignty of God’s grace....[I]f they saw others perish in unbelief, it was not because they were worse, but because of the inscrutable will of God, who gives to some, and withholds from others, the gift of saving faith. Those champions of freedom taught the slavery of the will in all things pertaining to spiritual righteousness. They drew their moral strength from grace alone. They feared God, and nothing else. Their very fear of God made them fearless of men. The same may be said of the French Huguenots and the English Puritans.”<sup>1</sup>

❖ PHILIP SCHAFF

**A**s the Reformation spread on the European continent, it soon came to the Netherlands. While the ministry of Martin Luther in Germany never made strong inroads into this country, the teaching of John Calvin in Geneva did. What Calvin taught appeared to the Dutch people as biblical truth. It was the high theology and the lofty truths of Scripture, as articulated by the Genevan Reformer and others such as Theodore Beza, that led them to revolt against the domination of the Pope. It was the transcendent teaching of sovereign grace that impelled them to establish the Netherlands as a Protestant country. But the main story line in the Netherlands was what would develop doctrinally in the debate within Christianity between Calvinism and Arminianism.

#### **ALL THE REFORMERS WERE PREDESTINARIANS**

To a man, the Reformers were *all* predestinarian in their understanding of God’s salvation of fallen man. That is to say, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and Beza were *all* committed to the biblical teaching of sovereign grace. The formal principle—*sola*

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910, 1984), 431-432.

*Scriptura*—drove these men back to the inspired text of the written Word in their search for truth. It was in their careful exegesis and proper interpretation of Scripture that the truth was clearly opened before them, and the perspicuity of the sovereignty of God in predestinating salvation for His elect was lucid before their eyes. Lorraine Boettner writes:

It was taught not only by Calvin, but by Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon (although Melanchthon later retreated toward the Semi-Pelagian position), by Bullinger, Bucer, and all of the outstanding leaders in the Reformation. While differing on some other points they agreed on this doctrine of Predestination and taught it with emphasis. Luther's chief work, *The Bondage of the Will*, shows that he went into the doctrine as heartily as did Calvin himself.<sup>2</sup>

### STANDING TOGETHER FIRM ON THE SAME GROUND

All the Reformers stood on this *same* ground, the *high* ground of the sovereign grace of God. While they differed on various secondary points—mode of baptism, style of worship, etc.—they, nevertheless, spoke with *one* voice regarding the purity of saving grace. They all drank from the *same* fountain of truth. They declared and defended the *same* system of truth. J. I. Packer writes:

All the leading Protestant theologians of the first epoch of the Reformation, stood on precisely the same ground here. On other points, they had their differences; but in asserting the helplessness of man in sin, and the sovereignty of God in grace, they were entirely at one. To all of them, these doctrines were the very life-blood of the Christian faith... To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort.<sup>3</sup>

This being said, that all the Reformers were predestinarian. But, tragically, the first significant departure from this conviction took place in the Netherlands. At the start of the seventeenth century, there were those among the Dutch who were former students and

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<sup>2</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA/Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959, 1999), 11. [Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963), 1].

<sup>3</sup> Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 12. [James I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, "Historical and Theological Introduction," in *The Bondage of the Will*, by Martin Luther (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1957), 58-59].

followers of the teaching of Jacobus Arminius who broke rank. They departed from the standard of sound words that had been reestablished in the Reformation. These "Arminians" ascribed a man-centered view of salvation and the loyal adherents to the truth responded with the five points of Calvinism. Let us now focus upon how this issue played out in the Reformation as it spread to the Netherlands.

## DUTCH REFORMATION

Here in the lowlands of the Netherlands, the Dutch people hotly debated this issue of God's sovereignty in man's salvation. This was certainly not the first time this dispute had arisen. Centuries earlier, this very controversy was publicly debated between Augustine and Pelagius. Again, it boiled up with Luther and Erasmus. Now once again, this same issue between divine sovereignty and human free will was raising its ugly head yet again. In this hour, the Dutch Reformers carefully defined and defended what has come to be known as the doctrines of grace, or the five headings of biblical Calvinism. It was here, in the Netherlands, that these "five points" were first stated. But it should be noted, it was in response to the "first points" of Arminianism, which were drafted first.

### JACOBUS ARMINIUS

In 1608, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch professor of theology, attempted to modify the prevailing Calvinism of the day by denying one of its core tenants, predestination, and what is more, affirmed human ability to choose Christ. A professor of at the University of Leyden, Arminius was originally a staunch Calvinist, having studied under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza in Geneva, but began to waver and weaken through his personal studies of Romans 7-9. This led him to deny the doctrines of God's sovereignty in salvation. In waging a fierce struggle against the mainline Reformed position, Arminius stood virtually alone, along with a few followers, in denying the biblical truths of human inability, divine election, and predestination. Arminius died in 1609 and one year later, in 1610, his followers compiled their ideas in the *Remonstrance* (protest). Needless to say, this produced a fire storm of theological controversy. A summary of the "five points" of Arminianism is as follows:

### THE FIVE POINTS OF ARMINIANISM

The "five points" of Arminianism was first drafted by the followers of Jacobus Arminius, as a reaction against the God-centered theology of the Reformation. It was a compromise position, a halfway house between Roman Catholicism and Protestant theology.<sup>4</sup> It sought to dull the sharp edge of the sovereign grace of God that was taught by virtually all the Reformers, including Luther and Calvin. The position of the Arminians reads as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> For a restatement of the Arminian position, see James Montgomery Boice with Philip Ryker, *The Doctrines of Grace*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 27-8.

### **ARTICLE 1: CONDITIONAL ELECTION**

Human nature, they asserted, has been crippled by the Fall, but not totally disabled. Though man is not basically good, neither is he completely bad. The will is *not* in bondage to sin, but retains the ability to freely believe upon Christ. Every sinner possesses the capacity to choose for or against God. God's eternal choice to save certain sinners was based entirely on their foreseen faith. Election, thus, is God looking down the tunnel of time to see who would choose Him, and then based upon this divine foresight, chooses those who choose Him. Thus, election is *conditional*, that is, conditioned by man's will.

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

### **ARTICLE 2: UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT**

It then follows, accordingly, that Christ died for each and every person alike. Thus, Christ's death on the cross makes salvation *possible* for everyone, but does *not* actually save anyone in particular. By this view, Jesus merely made man *reconcilable*, but did not necessarily reconcile anyone. The cross only made man redeemable, but did not in reality, redeem. Most for whom Christ died, He died in vain.

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

### **ARTICLE 3: INFLUENCING GRACE**

The Spirit does everything it can to convince the sinner to trust in Christ, but no further. Thus, saving faith is *not* a divine gift, but solely a human decision. The ability to believe inherently originates within man. The Spirit influences man toward faith, but does not give the gift of faith.

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

### **ARTICLE 4: RESISTIBLE GRACE**

Sinners are able to resist the Holy Spirit. The will of man is greater than the will and work of God. The Spirit can only do so much—convict and convince—but beyond that,

the matter lies with sinful man. The Holy Spirit will not impart new spiritual life until the sinner first believes.

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

#### **ARTICLE 5: DEFECTIBLE GRACE**

Those who are truly saved can lose their salvation. They can repent of their repentance. They can fall away from saving grace. Thus, eternal life is not forever secure when a sinner comes to Christ. The believing sinner must keep himself saved.

*That those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith, and thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations. . . . But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Spirit, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds.<sup>5</sup>*

#### **SYNOD OF DORT**

In response to the five points of Arminianism, i.e., the *Remonstrance*, the Dutch Calvinists thoroughly rejected these articles as being unbiblical and demeaning of the glory of God. In order to counter those man-flattering teachings, the leaders in the Netherlands convened at the Synod of Dort in 1618 to draft a response. This council of leading theologians and pastors met in the city of Dort, or Dordt or Dortrecht, in the Netherlands. There were 84 delegates present, 58 chosen by the churches of Holland, 18 secular commissioners, and the rest were from England, Switzerland, France, etc. It was an international assembly, as 28 of the 130 present were from England, Switzerland, France, etc. They met for 154 sessions from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619, with its main purpose being to uphold or condemn the doctrines of Arminius and the *Remonstrance* and to set forth the clear teaching of Scripture.

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<sup>5</sup> "The Five Arminian Articles," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., 6th edn., ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff (1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3:545-59.

## THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

The result was the "Five Points" of Calvinism. The Synod was also given the tasks of compiling a large commentary on the Bible, overseeing a revision of the Dutch translation of the Bible and a revision of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, if necessary. What resulted was the drawing up of the Canons (or, standards) of the Synod of Dort, a well-developed, carefully-worded statement of Reformed theology pertaining to matters of salvation, intended to refute the weak Arminian position.<sup>6</sup>

Here is a general restatement of the five points of Calvinism as defined by the Synod, loosely restated, to counter the claims of Arminius.

- 1. Total depravity.** Sin has so utterly pervaded *every* part of man's nature that nothing remains untouched or unpolluted by sin. The result is a *radical* depravity that invades every aspect of man's being. His mind is darkened; his desires are defiled; his will is dead.
- 2. Unconditional election.** If man is totally depraved, which he is, then salvation must originate entirely with God. Since man cannot and will not seek or choose God, God must choose and seek man. Salvation is by divine initiative in eternity past. It is a loving act of God's sovereign will, having chosen all who would believe before the time began. Thus, saving faith in Christ is not the cause of election, but the *result* of it.
- 3. Definite atonement.** Salvation is the work of the triune God, working in perfect unity together. The elect were given by the Father to the Son before the foundation of the world to be Christ's own possession. Thus, when Christ died, it had a specific purpose in view, the salvation of all those "given ones." Christ died for all who would believe and be saved. Jesus offered Himself as a perfect substitute for God's chosen people. In His substitutionary death, Christ did not merely make salvation hypothetically possible for all people. Rather, He *actually* saved a *specific* people with a *definite* and *particular* sacrifice. Not a drop of His blood was wasted, or in vain.
- 4. Irresistible grace.** Christ's atonement must be applied, and this is the effectual work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect. Working with the outward call of the gospel, the inward call of the Spirit inevitably draws God's chosen people to faith in Christ. This work of grace is irresistible and invincible in the mind, heart, and will of those chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Son.

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller discussion yet easy read concerning the Synod of Dort, see *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 54-67.

5. **Persevering grace.** All who have been brought to faith in Christ will never perish. They *will* pursue a life of personal holiness and will *never* fall away from grace. All the saints are preserved for glory and are distinguished now with godly lives which are sanctified by the Spirit.

#### **THE HIGHEST PRINCIPLE: DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY**

R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes that the heart of the issue for Calvinistic doctrine is the clear biblical teaching on divine sovereignty. God's will—is supreme, not man's will. God's eternal purposes are ultimately determinative, not the impulses or whims of man. This truth is taught throughout Scripture, from cover to cover. Mohler writes:

The central tenet of Calvinism is the sovereignty of God. This is the starting point and the highest principle of Reformed theology. Calvinism is God-centered and draws its understanding of God directly from His self-revelation in Scripture. The God revealed in the Bible is sovereign Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer. . . . The Bible teaches us that we are born sinners, and are thus spiritually dead. Dead in our sins, we cannot on our own even respond to God's grace. Thus, as Jesus told His disciples, "For this reason I have said to you that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted to him from the Father" (John 6:65). Further, the Bible makes it clear that God has chosen a people "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter 1:2). Paul in writing to the Ephesian church, states that the Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world and "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3-5). The New Testament resounds with words including "chosen," "election," and "predestined." The issue is not whether these are taught by Calvin, but whether they are taught in Scripture. . . . Calvinism is nothing more and nothing less than the simple assertion that salvation is all of grace, from the beginning to the end. God saves sinners.<sup>7</sup>

#### **CANONS OF DORT**

The authors of the Canons (or rules) sought to refute the new, strange teaching of Arminianism, and to do so in a way that showed historic Reformed theology to be the core teaching of Scripture. The Arminians were claiming that Calvinism was sectarian, an elitist position, but the Canons of Dort were designed to show that such was not true. Instead, the Reformed position, they claimed, was noncontroversial, based solely upon commonly held truths of Christianity embraced by all believers. They showed how the Reformed view flowed naturally and biblically from this basic foundation. Thus, the Canons begin *not* with the mind of God in eternity past. Rather, they start with generally agreed upon truths, i.e., the universality of sin and the alienation of the entire human race from God. Thus, the first article of the Canons read:

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<sup>7</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Fidelitas Article, *The Reformation of Doctrine and the Renewal of the Church*, 1-2.

### **ARTICLE 1: UNIVERSAL GUILT**

This first article begins with the affirmation of the original sin of Adam and the fall of the entire human race by his one act of rebellion in universal guilt, total depravity, and a state of condemning sin:

*As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the apostle: "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God" (Rom. 3:19). And: "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). And: "for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).*

In this first article, the intent was to establish the fact that all men are sinners and deserve eternal punishment. It then must follow that God is not obligated to save any. No sinful being has any right or claim on God's mercy. If God had sent the entire human race to hell, He would be just and righteous. This declaration of universal guilt and condemnation leads to the second article:

### **ARTICLE 2: DIVINE LOVE**

This second article teaches that despite man's intentional sin, God is a God of infinite love. So great is the love of God that He desires to save lost sinners who are ruined by sin. It is His very nature to rescue and redeem that which is lost:

*But in this the love of God was manifested, that He "sent his only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (1 John 4:9; John 3:16).*

This second article reveals the good news of God's love set forth for this world of lost sinners. God, acting in infinite mercy, did not leave all mankind in the misery of their helpless fallen state. Rather, in great love, God sent His own Son into the world to save sinners. Everyone who will trust Christ will be saved. This was intended to remove the straw man argument that many people want to be saved, but cannot be because they are not elect, a gross caricature which is unfounded. The third article is:

### **ARTICLE 3: GLOBAL EVANGELISM**

The love of God is demonstrated in the commissioning of His servants to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every living creature:

*And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleases; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14,15).*



This third article shows that the love of God is shown not only in sending His Son to save sinners, but also in sending His preachers into all the world to proclaim the gospel. This article is designed to negate another straw man argument, one which questions why Christians should witness and seek to make Christ known. The answer is that God has appointed all the necessary means to accomplish His chosen ends. Preachers *must* be sent to herald the gospel to all the world. *This* is how God has chosen to work. He has appointed the *universal* preaching of the gospel. This leads to the fourth article:

#### **ARTICLE 4: HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

All men are held responsible before God for the choices they make. They are accountable to God to rightly respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ:

*The wrath of God abides upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith are by Him delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.*

This fourth article states that all who reject Christ will suffer accordingly for their own choices. They have no one to blame but themselves. By dying in unbelief, they will *remain* eternally lost in their hopeless condition. *This* is a grievous sin, namely, rejecting the gospel. But those who receive God's free offer of salvation inherit eternal life. Man is held responsible by God for his response to the gospel. Thus, the fifth article next states:

#### **ARTICLE 5: INHERENT UNBELIEF**

This fifth article is intended to show that the cause of unbelief is not in God, but in man. No one can blame God for their unbelief.

*The cause or guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins is no wise in God, but in man himself; whereas faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God, as it is written: "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Likewise: "To you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him," etc. (Phil. 1:29).*

Sinners exercise their *own* rebellious wills to resist God and reject His Son. No blame can be assigned to Him. Unbelievers have *only themselves* to blame for their unbelief, not God. God does *not* give the gift of unbelief to sinners, yet He does give the gift of faith to those who do believe. Thus, believers have *only God* to thank for the gift of saving faith. These first five articles convey the common position of all Protestants, not merely a few who hold to the preaching of the Reformers. So the question must be raised: Who do some receive the gift of faith and others not? The answer comes in the sixth article:

## **ARTICLE 6: FAITH GIVEN**

This sixth article makes it clear that some receive the gift of faith *not* because of something in themselves, *but* because of something in God.

*That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree. "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18, A.V.). "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). According to which decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And here is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest it to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.*

According to the eternal counsel of God, He has determined to give the gift of saving faith to some and not to others. Not only has God sent His Son to die for sinners, but He has also sent His Spirit to convict hearts and change wills so that His chosen ones will believe. In giving the gift of faith to some, God shows His love and mercy. In leaving the rest in their sin, He shows His righteousness and justice. From this, the seventh article, the longest, issues a far-reaching statement on divine election:

## **ARTICLE 7: SOVEREIGN ELECTION**

Here we learn that divine election cannot be changed nor frustrated, but stands as a fixed certainty.

*Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation. This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy, and for the praise of the riches of His glorious grace; as it is written: "Each as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love; having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely*

*bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:4,5,6). And elsewhere: “Whom he foreordained, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30.*

Moreover, the driving motive of God’s choice is His own good pleasure. This choice is *not* arbitrary or capricious, but made with infinite wisdom. Accordingly, God choose specific individuals for salvation, not merely categories of people for service. Thus, no one chosen can boast about their election or salvation. This truth humbles His elect and moves them to deepest wonder and highest praise. Truly, salvation is of the Lord, beginning to end. The next articles, Articles 8-18, clarify specific aspects of the doctrine of election. The twelfth article deals with the assurance of one’s election:

#### **ARTICLE 12: DIVINE ASSURANCE**

Those who are chosen by God may know that they are elect. Assurance of their election will be their real and rightful experience:

*The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election, not be inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God, but by observing in themselves with a spiritual joy and holy pleasure the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God – such as, a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc.*

This twelfth article instructs believers to seek assurance of their election, not by trying to pry into the mind of God – such is impossible – but to search the Scripture. The fruit of repentance and faith can always be seen in the lives of the elect, which brings true assurance of one’s election. This can be seen in one’s own life. Concerning those passed over and left in their sin by God, the fifteenth article states:

#### **ARTICLE 15: DIVINE REPROBATION**

Those who are the non-elect are justly passed over by God and left in their condemnation:

*What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, has decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but, permitting them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the Author of*

*sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous Judge and Avenger thereof.*

This fifteenth article teaches the doctrine of reprobation, or the passing over by God of some sinners leaving them in their own sin. Thus, they are responsible for their own rejection, bringing upon themselves their own just condemnation and punishment for their sins. They are not condemned because they are passed over, but because they are sinners. Reprobation is a clear, undeniable teaching of Scripture (John 6:70-71; 13:18; 17:12; Romans 9:6-21; 1 Peter 2:8; Jude 4).

## **A LONG LINE OF GODLY MEN**

These statements crafted by the Synod of Dort contain the purest expression of Reformed theology. It must be stressed that Calvin himself did not state them. Those were not even the product of his followers. These doctrinal truths are the heartbeat of Scripture itself, rooted and grounded in the marrow of God's Word. Such a God-centered view of salvation is clearly contained in the Psalms. They were taught by Jesus Himself, especially in John 6, 10, and 17, as well as in many other places. The apostle Paul expounded them in his letters to the Romans, chapters 8, 9, and 11, and Ephesians, chapters 1 and 2. The apostle Peter did the same. Down through the centuries, many spiritual giants have embraced these clear teachings and form a long line of stalwarts. These would include:

### **THE REFORMERS**

Virtually all the Reformers were steeped in a high view of God's sovereign grace in salvation. Any reading of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* or Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* will reveal this.

- Martin Luther
- John Calvin
- William Tyndale
- John Knox

### **THE PURITANS**

The Puritans were reformed theologians, and it was through their teaching that England and Scotland came under an extraordinary influence of spiritual power. These were the men who were the heirs of the Reformation.

- John Bunyan
- Thomas Cartwright
- Matthew Henry
- John Owen

### **COLONIAL AMERICANS**

The Great Awakening swept through the newly-settled Americas and brought with it a rush of Calvinistic theology. The Reformed system of truth was the predominate position in the days of Colonial America.

- Jonathan Edwards
- George Whitefield
- Colton Mather

### **HYMN WRITERS**

Many of the great hymn writers were those committed to the doctrines of grace. It was their high view of God that led them to compose hymns of high praise for God. Among them are:

- John Newton
- Isaac Watts
- William Cowper
- Augustus Toplady

### **MODERN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT**

For the most part, those who launched the modern missions movement were staunchly Calvinistic in convictions. They believed that there were elect all over the earth and, thus, they went forth to preach the gospel, believing God would give them success. They saw the doctrine of election not as a hindrance to evangelism and missions, but as that which actually guarantees its success.

- William Carey
- John Ryland
- David Livingstone
- Henry Martin

### **ENGLISH EXPOSITORS**

Over the last two hundred years, England has seen raised up some of the finest preachers the world has ever known, many of them Reformed in their doctrine. The clarity of their high doctrine and the influence of their esteemed pulpits were unrivaled in their day.

- Charles H. Spurgeon
- Charles Simeon
- Martyn Lloyd Jones

### **PRINCETON PROFESSORS**

Princeton Seminary became the bastion of Reformed theology in the world, and the leading evangelical influence in America, during the nineteenth century. The distinguished professors of this institution kept the torch of truth burning brightly for

many decades. Jonathan Edwards was appointed the second president when it was first known as the College of New Jersey, but he died within weeks of assuming the position.

- Alexander Archibald
- Charles Hodge
- A. A. Hodge
- Benjamin B. Warfield
- J. Gresham Mecham

#### **SOUTHERN BAPTIST FOUNDERS**

The founders of the Southern Baptist Convention were unquestionably Calvinistic in their theological convictions. Reformed theology was the prevailing commitment in the SBC at the seminary level in the training of pastors and missionaries, as well as the officers of the Convention and the Foreign Mission Board.

- James P. Boyce
- John A. Broadus
- J. B. Gambrell
- B. H. Carroll

R. Albert Mohler writes under the title *Calvinism and the Southern Baptist Convention*:

Even the opponents of Calvinism must admit, if historically informed, that Calvinism is the theological tradition into which the Baptist movement was born. The same is true of the Southern Baptist Convention. The most influential Baptist churches, leaders, confessions of faith, and theologians of the founding era were Calvinistic. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was born of this Calvinistic tradition, as reflected in its *Abstract of Principles*. James P. Boyce, in calling for the Seminary's founding, charged it to oppose all heresies, including Arminianism. It was not until well into the twentieth century that any knowledgeable person could claim that Southern Baptists were anything but Calvinists. . . . Boyce's colleague John A. Broadus – the greatest Baptist preacher of his day – was so certain that Calvinism was revealed in the Bible that he challenged those who sneer at Calvinism to "sneer at Mount Blanc." Broadus was certain that the doctrines known as Calvinism were those preached by Paul and the other Apostles, and were revealed in Holy Scripture. Other Southern Baptist leaders were also well-identified Calvinists. These included J. B. Gambrell and B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Seminary. Calvinism was the mainstream in the Southern Baptist Convention until the turn of the century. The rise of modern notions of individual liberty and the general spirit of the age have led to an accommodation of historic doctrines in some circles.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> (*Fidelitas: Comment on News and Issues* by R. Albert Mohler, Jr., undated), 2-3.

## AMERICAN EXPOSITORS

Many of the great pulpits in America belong to those who are openly identified with Reformed theology. These are men whose preaching towers above the times.

- James Montgomery Boice
- John MacArthur
- R. C. Sproul
- D. James Kennedy
- John Piper

## THE ONE POINT OF THE FIVE POINTS

In reality, there is only *one* point to the five points of the doctrines of grace. That *one* point is the glory of God in the salvation of undeserving sinners. It is sovereign grace, as taught in the five headings of biblical Calvinism, that brings *most* glory to God. This system of truth, rightly extracted from Scripture, *most* elevates God and lowers man. It *most* honors God and humbles man. These truths are the *most* God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, pride-crushing, life-changing, worship-inspiring, joy-producing, evangelism-encouraging, and missions—launching truths of all. When correctly understood and properly applied, these are the Scripture-taught, time-honored truths that have been used by God to bring about reformations and great awakenings throughout church history.

This one point to the five points of biblical Calvinism was, perhaps, best summarized by J. I. Packer in his “Introductory Essay” to the luminous *The Death of Death in the Death* of by John Owen. In this well-articulated piece, Packer writes:

The five points, though separately stated, are really inseparable. They hang together; you cannot reject one without rejecting them all, at least in the sense in which the Synod meant them. For to Calvinism there is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that God saves sinners. God—the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father’s will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. Saves—does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. Sinners—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God’s will or better their spiritual lot. God saves sinners—and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man’s own, or by soft-pedaling the sinner’s inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Saviour. This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the “five points” are

concerned to establish and Arminianism in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen.<sup>9</sup>

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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<sup>9</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA/Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959, 1999), 14-15. [Packer, "Introductory Essay," 4-5.] [Ibid., 6. Italics are his.]