

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Continental Divide of Theology

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Through the western regions of North America, there runs an imaginary geographic line that determines the flow of streams into oceans. It is known as the Continental Divide. Ultimately, precipitation falling on the east side of this great divide will flow into the Atlantic Ocean. Likewise, water falling on the western slopes of this line will surge in the opposite direction until it finally empties into the Pacific Ocean. Needless to say, a vast continent separates these immense bodies of water. It is seemingly far-fetched to ponder that a raindrop falling atop a mountain in Colorado will flow to the Pacific, while another drop, falling but a short distance away, will flow into the Atlantic. Nevertheless, once the water pours down on a particular side of this great divide, its path is determined and its direction is unchangeable.

Geography is not the only place we find a great divide. There is a high ground that runs through church history as well—a Continental Divide of theology. This great divide of doctrine separates two distinctly different streams of thought that flow in opposite directions. To be specific, this determinative high ground is one's theology of God, man, and salvation. This is the highest of all thought, and it divides all doctrine into two schools. Historically, these two ways of thinking about God and His saving grace have been called by various names. Some have identified them as Augustinianism and Pelagianism. Others have named them Calvinism and Arminianism. Still others have defined them as Reformed and Catholic, while others have used the terms predestination and free will. But by whatever name, these streams are determined by the Continental Divide of theology.

This metaphorical divide differs from the geographical Continental Divide in one key respect. Whereas streams flowing west and east of the Rocky Mountains descend gradually to the plains and lowlands where they meet the oceans, the terrain on the two sides of the doctrinal divide is quite different. On one side we find solid highlands of truth. On the other side there are precipitous slopes of half-truths and full error.

Over the centuries, seasons of reformation and revival in the church have come when the sovereign grace of God has been openly proclaimed and clearly taught. When a high view of God has been infused into the hearts and minds of God's people, the church has sat on the elevated plateaus of transcendent truth. This lofty ground is Calvinism—the high ground for the church. The lofty truths of divine sovereignty provide the greatest and grandest view of God. The doctrines of grace serve to elevate the entire life of the church.

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The great Princeton theologian Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, writing more than a century ago, perceptively noted, “The world should realize with increased clearness that Evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism.” At first glance, this stunning statement may appear to be an exaggeration, even hyperbole. But the more it is weighed, the more one discerns that evangelicalism—that part of the body of Christ that rightly adheres to the inerrancy of Scripture, the total depravity of man, and the sovereignty of God in all aspects of life—always needs the doctrines of sovereign grace to anchor it to the high ground. For without the theological teachings of Reformed truth concerning God’s sovereignty in man’s salvation, the church is weakened and made vulnerable, soon to begin an inevitable decline into baser beliefs, whether she realizes it or not.

Whenever the church becomes increasingly man-centered, she begins the downhill slide, often without recovery, and always to her detriment. Once yielding the high ground of Calvinism, a self-absorbed church puts its full weight onto the slippery slope of Arminianism, resulting in a loss of its foundational stability. Tragically, however, the descent rarely stops there. Historically, man-centered doctrine has served only as a catalyst for an even greater fall.

Rappelling down the slippery slopes of Arminianism, one is soon to find the church sinking deeper and deeper into a murky quagmire of heretical ideas. Such a descent inevitably gives way to liberalism, the utter rejection of the absolute authority of Scripture. From liberalism—given enough time—the church always plunges yet lower into ecumenism, that deadly philosophy that embraces all religions as having some part of the truth. Continuing this downward spiral, the church plummets into universalism, the damning belief that all men eventually will be saved. Yet worse, universalism gives way to agnosticism, a degenerate view that one cannot even know whether there is a God. Finally, the church falls into the deepest abyss—the hellish flames of atheism, the belief that there is no God.

Never has the need been greater for the truths of sovereign grace to be firmly established in the church. Her thinking about God desperately needs to be flowing in the right direction. As the church thinks, so she worships; and, as the church worships, so she lives, serves, and evangelizes. The church’s right view of God and the outworking of His grace gives shape to everything that is vital and important. The church must recapture her lofty vision of God and, thereby, be anchored to the solid rock of His absolute supremacy in all things. Only then will the church have a God-centered orientation in all matters of ministry. This, I believe, is the desperate need of the hour.

This excerpt is adapted from [Foundations of Grace](#) by Steven J. Lawson.

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