

## THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE: PART ONE – INTRODUCTION

### I. THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE AS A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

#### A. The need and purpose of systematic theology

##### 1. To instruct us in doctrine

- **Tit. 2:1** - But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.
- **Titus 1:9-10** says that the overseer must be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. 10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers”.

##### 2. To protect us from false teaching

- **2 Tim. 4:1-4** - 1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

##### 3. To enhance our worship

- **QUOTE**: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “The doctrines of the Bible are not a subject Old Testament be studied; rather we should desire to know them in order that, having known them we may not be ‘puffed up’ with knowledge, and excited about our information, but may draw nearer to God in worship, praise, and adoration, because we have seen, in a fuller way that we have every seen before, the glory of our wondrous God.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Ps. 139:17** – How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

#### B. The methods of systematic theology

- The Doctrines of Grace (henceforth D.O.G.; also called Calvinism) are a systematic theology. They are a system of doctrines that represent a particular view of salvation as it relates to God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Therefore, it is important that we understand how we arrive at doctrine and how we interpret Scripture to form our systems of theology. We also need to be constantly aware of the dangers inherent in this discipline.
- To **systematize** is to take a set of facts and arrange them in orderly form so that they have a logical, cohesive connection together. It means that we must span all of Scripture and carefully try to understand how different verses in different contexts, written at different times and by different authors, fit together to form biblical doctrines. The Bible does not contradict itself.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if we understand and

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 10.

<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of inerrancy guarantees this truth. Because Scripture is inspired, it is inerrant. Because it is inerrant, it is infallible. Because it is perfect, it is also coherent. Therefore, Scripture never contradicts other Scripture.

interpret Scripture correctly, we should emerge with a coherent system of theology when any given topic (or doctrine) is studied carefully, even if not comprehensively.

- The problem is that the Bible was not written systematically, so we must use both **deductive** and **inductive principles** of biblical study to arrive at doctrine. We must collect all the relevant Scriptures that speak directly or indirectly to a particular subject, interpret them separately, analyze them together, formulate truth propositions from them, then organize those propositions in a systematic, coherent format. That is a massive task!
- **ILL**: Doing systematic theology is like putting together a puzzle, where each piece is a propositional truth. As you fit pieces together, a picture begins to emerge and we give that picture a name like “doctrines of grace” or “holiness” or “marriage,” etc.

### C. The foundations of systematic theology

- The foundation of systematic theology is the rigorous interpretation of **Scripture** using the historical-grammatical method. Hermeneutics and exegesis must be the basis of our theology. It should not be speculative or based on logical suppositions and deductions primarily. It should be biblical. Scripture should always be interpreted in light of other Scripture and each passage understood in its context before it is placed within a system.
- Therefore, any doctrine must begin with the exegesis of Scripture, moving to biblical theology, then forming into systematic theology. Exegesis → Biblical Theology → Systematic Theology (Doctrine)
- **Reason** also plays a prominent role in systematics. God does not contradict Himself, therefore our theology must not be contradictory either. There may be difficulties which we do not fully understand, but there should not be clear, undeniable contradictions in what we believe Scripture to be saying. However, our reason must always be subjected to revelation, not sit in judgment of it.
- **Experience** can also inform us in understanding how a particular doctrine applies. Yet experience is notoriously unreliable and we must subject all experience to the clear light of Scripture and sound reason first before accepting it as truthful and valid.
- Therefore, the order of authority in theology is Scripture first, reason second, and experience third.

### D. Holding fast to biblical tensions in systematic theology

- Sometimes in the process of ordering our theology, we run into **propositions** (truth statements) that seem to be contradictory, but are necessary to maintain if we are faithful to Scripture. Some things in Scripture are “hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16). Furthermore, **Dt. 29:29** says that “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” Therefore, God’s secret plan is not fully revealed in Scripture. Some things do indeed remain a mystery. But the things that are revealed are **perfectly true and trustworthy**, so we must not be afraid to hold tensions in the Bible that are clearly presented and often repeated. Such is the case with Divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
- This tension creates what J. I. Packer terms an “**antinomy**.” He defines antinomy as “an apparent contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical,

reasonable and necessary.”<sup>3</sup> “An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable.”<sup>4</sup> It is not a real contradiction, but an apparent one. There are cogent, biblical reasons for believing both principles in the Scripture, therefore we cannot compromise them. Yet their full and complete reconciliation remains a mystery.

- So when we encounter these kinds of truths in Scripture, we must not compromise one truth at the expense of the other. We must hold fast to what Scripture teaches and accept antinomies, realizing that they are complementary and not contradictory. We must use each truth within the limits of its own sphere and reference. We must note connections between the two truths and allow for their coexistence. Scripture teaches that God, as King, orders and controls all things, including human actions.<sup>5</sup> Scripture also teaches that God, as Judge, holds every man responsible for the choices he makes.<sup>6</sup> Man is a responsible moral agent, yet is ultimately controlled by God. This is a revealed antinomy.
- **QUOTE:** When **C. H. Spurgeon** was asked if he could reconcile these two truths, his response was “**I wouldn’t try. I never reconcile friends.**” This is what we must hold to in studying these doctrines. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies, but friends.

#### E. The spirit of the debate

- Classical, mainstream Arminianism and classical, mainstream Calvinism are not enemies. They are different interpretations which seek to reconcile how Divine sovereignty and human responsibility meet in salvation. **I am a 6 point Calvinist!** But I grew up an Arminian and was always in Arminian churches until seminary. I taught Arminianism in church when I was younger (before seminary). My family are all Arminians. And my Arminian brethren are not heretics or ignorant fools or malicious doctrinal deviants. They are brothers in Christ who have a different soteriological paradigm. They have a different doctrine of salvation.
- In essentials **unity**; in non-essentials, **diversity**; in all things, **charity**. This should be the spirit of our debate over these issues. We should not attack people on the other side at all. If we disagree with their position, we should engage and challenge their teaching or their interpretations, but we should do so in a manner that honors Christ and fosters unity rather than division in the body. We should **contend** for our theological positions, but without being **contentious**.

#### F. The dangers of systematic theology

- The danger in systematics is that as we develop our theology, an artificial lens emerges that will skew our understanding of other Scriptural passages which don’t seem to fit in the system that we have created. The Scripture then comes to be interpreted by a system of theology rather than by the text and context itself. Our presuppositions about Scripture must be biblical and **we must allow Scripture to speak in its context**, even if it does not fit our system of doctrine. Ultimately, the question in evaluating any system (or a particular tenet of the system) is the question

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 25-26 *et passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 14:8; 50:20; Pr. 16:9; 21:1; Mt. 10:29; Ac. 9:27-28; Rom. 9:20-21; Eph 1:11.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 25; Rom. 2:1-16; Rev. 20:11-13.

- “Is this consistent with a grammatical-historical understanding of Scripture?” We must constantly test everything by God’s Word.
- **QUOTE: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:** “There can be no doubt at all that the commonest cause of all this [error in understanding the Bible] is our tendency so often to approach the Bible with a theory. We go to our Bibles with this theory, and everything we read is controlled by it. . . . There is a sense in which it is true to say that you can prove anything you like from the Bible. That is how heresies have arisen. The heretics were never dishonest men; they were mistaken men. . . . Their trouble was this: they evolved a theory and they were rather pleased with it; then they went back with this theory to the Bible, and they seemed to find it everywhere. If you read a verse and emphasize over-much some other half verse elsewhere, your theory is soon proved. . . . There is nothing so dangerous as to come to the Bible with a theory, with preconceived ideas, with some pet idea of our own, because the moment we do so, we shall be tempted to over-emphasize one aspect and under-emphasize another.”<sup>7</sup>
  - **Pr. 30:6** - Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.
  - **Charles Simeon** had a 3-fold test of any systematic doctrine:
    - 1) Does it humble the sinner?
    - 2) Does it exalt the Savior?
    - 3) Does it promote holiness?
  - You will find in this series that the doctrines of grace do all these things powerfully, when properly understood.

## II. A BRIEF HISTORY AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT<sup>8</sup>

- The term Arminianism comes from the Dutch seminary professor James Arminius. In **1610**, just one year after his death, his followers drew up five articles of faith based on his teachings. They presented these to the State of Holland in the form of a “**Remonstrance**” (which means protest) and insisted that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism (the official expressions of the Church of Holland) be changed to fit these doctrinal views. The Arminians objected to the what those confessions taught about divine sovereignty, human inability, unconditional election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. So the Arminian system proposed was in response to the prevailing Calvinistic understanding in the Church of Holland.
- The Arminian leaders became so strong that they were able to get civil authorities to decree that these contested doctrines could not be preached. In some instances, they succeeded in getting pulpits closed against ministers. The situation became increasingly worse until it appeared in 1617 that there might be a civil war. In November of that year

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<sup>7</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: One-Volume Edition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1976), 7 *et passim*.

<sup>8</sup> The following history is compiled from two sources: Walter A. Elwell, ed. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984; and David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas and S. Lance Quinn. *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., updated and expanded. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004.

the States General decreed that a synod should be called to settle the theological questions and bring peace to the country.<sup>9</sup>

- So a national synod was called to meet in the city of Dort in 1618 to examine these views in light of Scripture. The Synod of Dort was convened on November 13, 1618 and ended on May 9, 1619 (lasting seven months). There were 84 Dutch delegates (35 pastors and number of elders from various churches), 18 deputies from the States General, 5 theological professors and 27 foreign delegates. The members of the Synod represented Holland, Switzerland, various German states, England and Scotland. There were 154 sessions held during those seven months. They produced what is known as the Canons of Dort, which became known as the Five Points of Calvinism, or the TULIP: **T**otal Depravity, **U**nconditional Election, **L**imited Atonement, **I**rresistible Grace, **P**erseverance of the Saints.

### III. A CONTRAST OF ARMINIANISM AND CALVINISM

- See handout entitled “*Five Points of Arminianism contrasted with the Five Points of Calvinism.*”<sup>10</sup>

#### ARMINIANISM

##### 1. Free Will or Human Ability

Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man’s freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man’s freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God’s Spirit and be regenerated or resist God’s grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man’s act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner’s gift to God; it is man’s contribution to salvation.

#### CALVINISM

##### 1. Total Inability or Total Depravity

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not –indeed he cannot – choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit’s assistance to bring a sinner to Christ – it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God’s gift of salvation. It is God’s gift to the sinner, not the sinner’s gift to God.

#### ARMINIANISM

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<sup>9</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984), 332.

<sup>10</sup> David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., updated and expanded (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 5-8.

## **2. Conditional Election**

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon his foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit), but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

### CALVINISM

## **2. Unconditional Election**

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by, or conditioned upon, any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus, God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

### ARMINIANISM

## **3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement**

Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved, but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe in Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

### CALVINISM

## **3. Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement**

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith, which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.

### ARMINIANISM

## **4. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted**

The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

## CALVINISM

### 4. The Efficacious Call of the Spirit or Irresistible Grace

In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

## ARMINIANISM

### 5. Falling from Grace

Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc.

All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ – that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

## CALVINISM

### 5. Perseverance of the Saints

All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of almighty God and thus persevere to the end.

### Salvation according to Arminianism:

Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of *God* (who takes the initiative) and *man* (who must respond) – man's response being determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, choose to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus *man*, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

**Salvation according to Calvinism:**

Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus, *God*, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.