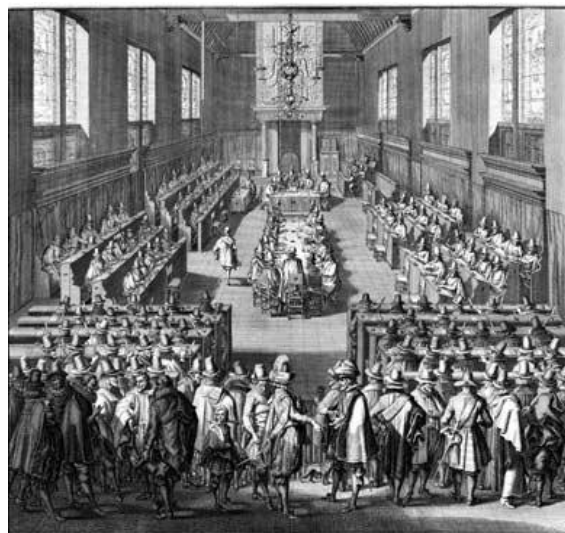


Grace Changes Everything

Part 2 – Of Humanity and Sin

Historical Review...

- The Doctrines of Grace were not a theological innovation. As we will see, these doctrines were taught by Jesus, the apostles and many of the early church fathers. The Protestant Reformers did not see themselves as innovators. They understood their work to be that of retrieving the church's historic doctrine.
- In the early 1600's a doctrinal controversy arose within the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. At the center of the controversy was Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) a pastor and theology professor who had studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva. Over time Arminius came to reject certain key doctrines of the Protestant faith. Indeed, his understanding of God's grace in salvation was nearly indistinguishable from that of Roman Catholicism.
- Following Arminius' death in 1610, some of his former students composed an explosive document which called for the rewriting of the church's confessional standards (*The Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*). Their document (the *Remonstrance of 1610*) was submitted to government/church authorities. Specifically, the Remonstrance of 1610 directly contradicted the church's confession at five key points. These five areas of departure came to be known as the five points of Arminianism.
- In response, a national synod was convened by the States-General of Holland on November 13, 1618. The 84 Dutch delegates were joined by 27 delegates from Germany, Switzerland, England, and Scotland. The synod gathered in 154 sessions during seven months. They concluded their work on May 9, 1619. The synod produced an official refutation of the five points of Arminianism. That document they composed is known as the *Canons of Dort*.
- The Canons reasserted those doctrines which the Remonstrance of 1610 explicitly denied. Those five points were not new doctrines. They were firm reaffirmations of doctrines at the heart of the Reformed Protestant (i.e. biblical) understanding of how God saves his people. They were eventually summarized in an acrostic:
 - T – Total Depravity
 - U – Unconditional Election
 - L – Limited Atonement
 - I – Irresistible Grace
 - P – Perseverance of the Saints



Afbeelding van het vermaarde Synode van Dordrecht in het jaar 1618 en 1619.

Distinctions that Make the Difference

The doctrinal distinctions between the doctrine of the Reformers and that of Arminians are not insignificant. Indeed, the Arminians believed the Reformed churches to be in grave error and should therefore literally rewrite their confessions of faith. That degree of division would have, for all intents and purposes, created a new church.

In his classic essay on the subject, J.I. Packer evaluates the theology of the Remonstrance:

The theology which it contained (known to history as Arminianism) stemmed from two philosophical principles: first, that divine sovereignty is not compatible with human freedom, nor therefore with human responsibility; second, that ability limits obligation...From these principles, the Arminians drew two deductions: first, that since the Bible regards faith as a free and responsible act, it cannot be caused by God, but is exercised independently of Him; second, that since the Bible regards faith as obligatory on the part of all who hear the gospel, ability to believe

must be universal. Hence, they maintained, Scripture must be interpreted as teaching the following positions: 1) Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him, nor 2) is he ever so completely controlled by God that he cannot reject it. 3) God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will of their own accord believe. 4) Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone [Arminianism denies that faith is given by God]; what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe. 5) It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost. Thus, Arminianism made man's salvation depend ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man's own work and, because his own, not God's in him.¹

Though the students of Jacob Arminius caused quite a stir, their theology was overwhelmingly rejected by the Reformed churches. The *Canons of Dort* served as the most prominent repudiation of Arminian doctrine. The members of the Synod of Dort rightly viewed salvation as God's work from beginning to end with all glory due to Him. All humanity is spiritually dead apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration by which the dead are raised to life and inexorably respond in repentance and faith which are themselves gifts of God's grace.

The creation and dignity of humanity

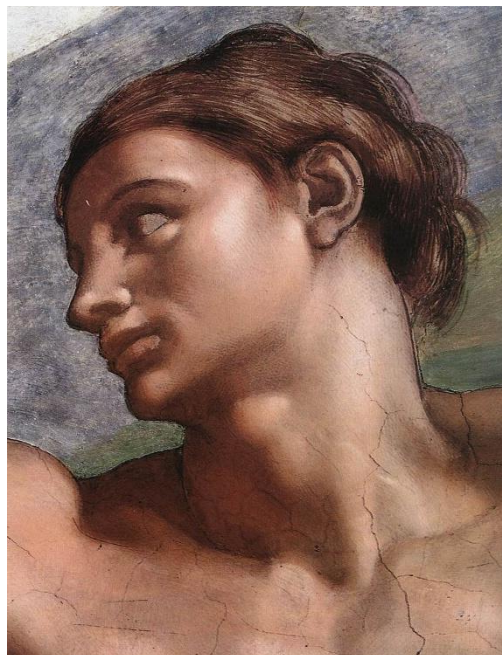
- **Genesis 1:26-31:**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth..."

- The Reformed Faith enthusiastically affirms the essential goodness of the created order while grieving the misery of the fallen condition.
- Mankind is the only thing in all creation which bears the image of God.
- **Psalm 139:13-14** – "I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."



Total Depravity (or, Comprehensive Corruption)

The doctrine of total depravity does not assert that humans are as sinful as they could possibly be. Indeed, humans are capable of doing good and honorable things. Being made in the image of God, men and women have a moral sense, even though it is fallen. The doctrine of total depravity holds that every dimension of our humanity is fallen, corrupted by sin. That includes our will, which apart from the sovereign work of the Spirit, will remain at enmity with God.

Arminianism holds that "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 to not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will and his

¹ J.I. Packer, "Introductory Essay," in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen (London: Banner of Truth, 1959) pp. 3-4

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 either to cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or to 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."²

Calvinism holds that "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."³

What the complete corruption of sin consists of...

1. Spiritual Deadness

- God warned Adam and Eve that on the day that they sinned they would "surely die" (**Genesis 2:16-17**).
- David confessed that he was born in sin (**Psalms 51:5**) and that "the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth..." (**Psalms 58:3**).
- Apart from the Spirit's sovereign work of regeneration man is spiritually dead (**Ezekiel 37:3-5**).
- **John 3:5-7** – Because we are born dead in our sins we must undergo a new birth by the Holy Spirit (regeneration).
- Sin came into the world through Adam "and death through sin..." (**Romans 5:12**).
- Outside of Christ, mankind is "dead in the trespasses and sins..." (**Ephesians 2:1-10**).
- Outside of Christ, mankind is "dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh" (**Colossians 2:13**).



2. Total Inability

- Scripture teaches us that outside of Christ we are dead in trespasses and sins (**Eph 2:1-10**). Spiritually speaking, we are unable to help ourselves or contribute to our salvation. This is why Jesus tells Nicodemus that what is needed is new birth, a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (**John 3:5-7**).
- **John 3:5-8; 6:44, 65** – Mankind is unable to come to Jesus without being drawn by God.
- **Romans 3:10-12** – Mankind is unable to do good or even seek after God.
- **Romans 8:7-8** tells us that the unregenerate *cannot* submit to God.
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** says that outside of Christ we have no ability to understand the gospel (see **2 Cor. 2:15** and **4:3**).
- Because man is in this condition, he cannot come to Christ unless he is drawn by the Father (**John 6:44, 65**), by means of the Spirit (**John 3:5-8**).

3. Darkened minds and corrupted hearts

The Fall has left humanity blind to spiritual truth. Outside of Christ our hearts are darkened and we are hopelessly inclined to sin.

² *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Steele, Thomas, & Lance (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1963) pp. 5-6

³ *Ibid.*

- **Genesis 6:5** – “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
- **Genesis 8:21** – “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”
- **Ecclesiastes 9:3** – “The hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live.”
- **Jeremiah 17:9** – “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
- Jesus taught that “out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft murder, adultery coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within...” (**Mark 7:21-23**).
- **John 3:19** – “People loved the darkness rather than the light.”
- **Romans 8:7-8** – “For the mind that set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** – Paul tells us that the unregenerate person “is not able to understand” the “things of the Spirit of God.”
- **Ephesians 5:8** – “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”
- **Titus 1:15** – To the “unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.”

4. *Spiritual Bondage*

- Jesus tells us that “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” (**John 8:34**)
- **Romans 6:20** – Before we knew the Lord we “were slaves of sin.”
- **Ephesians 1:1-2** – Outside of Christ we walk “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air...”
- **2 Timothy 2:25-26** – Unbelievers must be granted by the Lord “escape” from the devil’s snare because they are “captured by him to do his will.”
- **1 John 3:10** – Those who make a practice of unrighteousness are “children of the devil.”

5. *Powerless to change*

- **Matthew 12:33** – Bad trees can only produce bad fruit.
- **John 6:44, 65** – “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** – The unregenerate person cannot understand or accept the things of God.

The One Point of Calvinism

J.I. Packer warns against a simplistic equating of Reformed theology to a five point formula.

“The very act of setting out Calvinistic soteriology [the doctrine of salvation] in the form of five distinct points [a number corresponding to the five points of Arminianism] tends to obscure the organic character of Calvinistic thought on this subject. For 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 really is 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 to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. *Sinners* – man as God find 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-pedalling the sinner’s inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Savior. This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology with 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 forever; amen.”⁴

⁴ J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay”