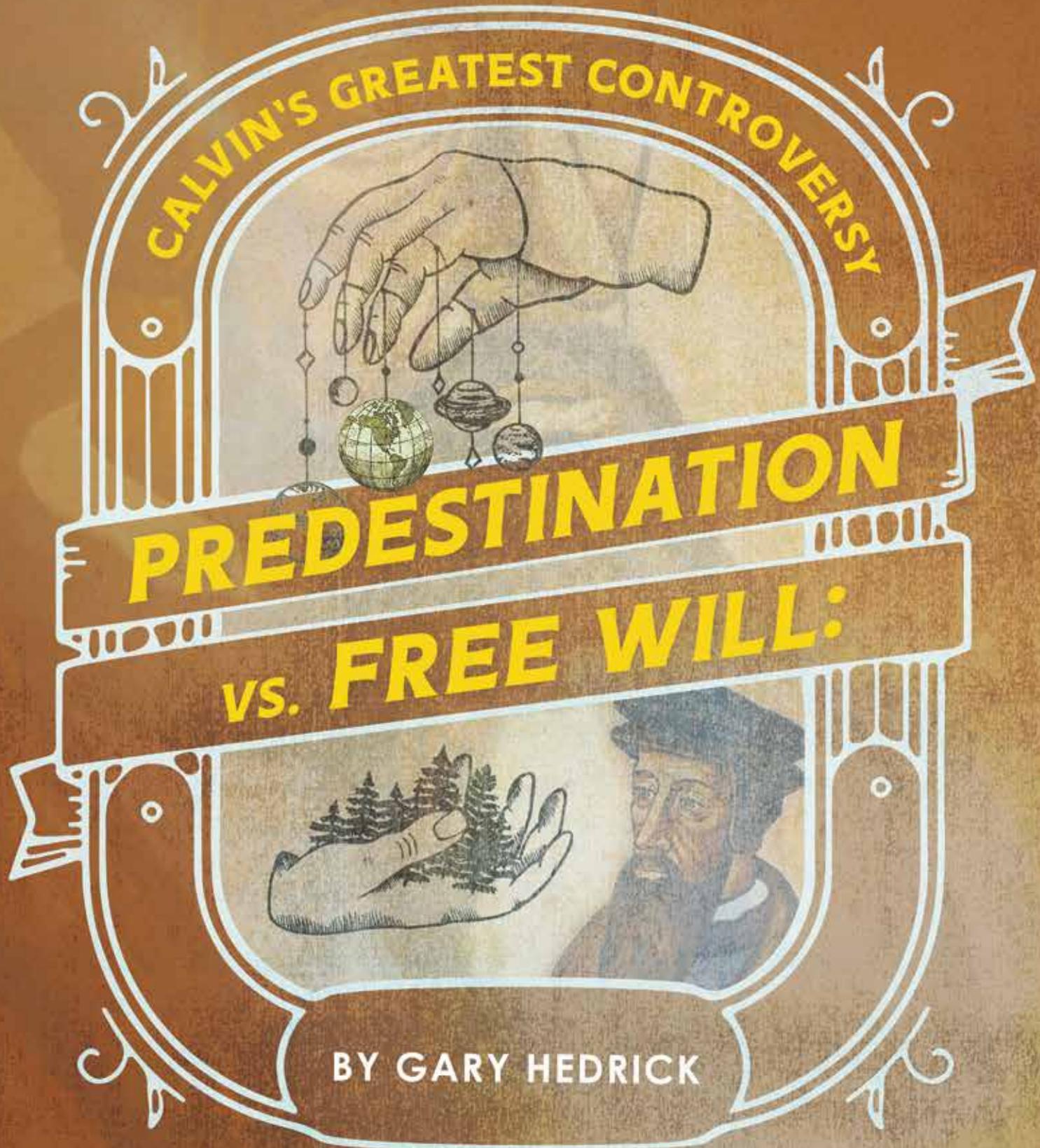




A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



In this issue, we follow up on our previous article about the fast-growing New Calvinist/New Reformed movement. This second installment deals with Unconditional Election, the core teaching of traditional TULIP Calvinism, and how the new generation of Calvinists is dealing with the challenges that come with it.

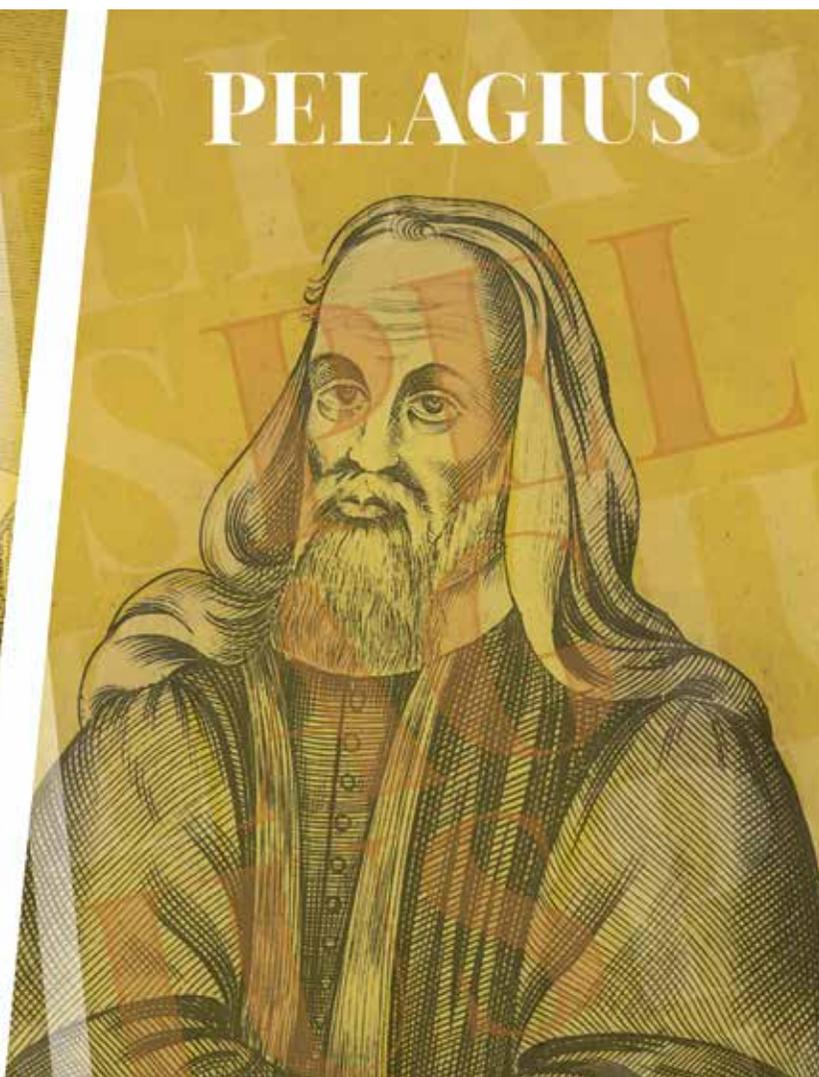
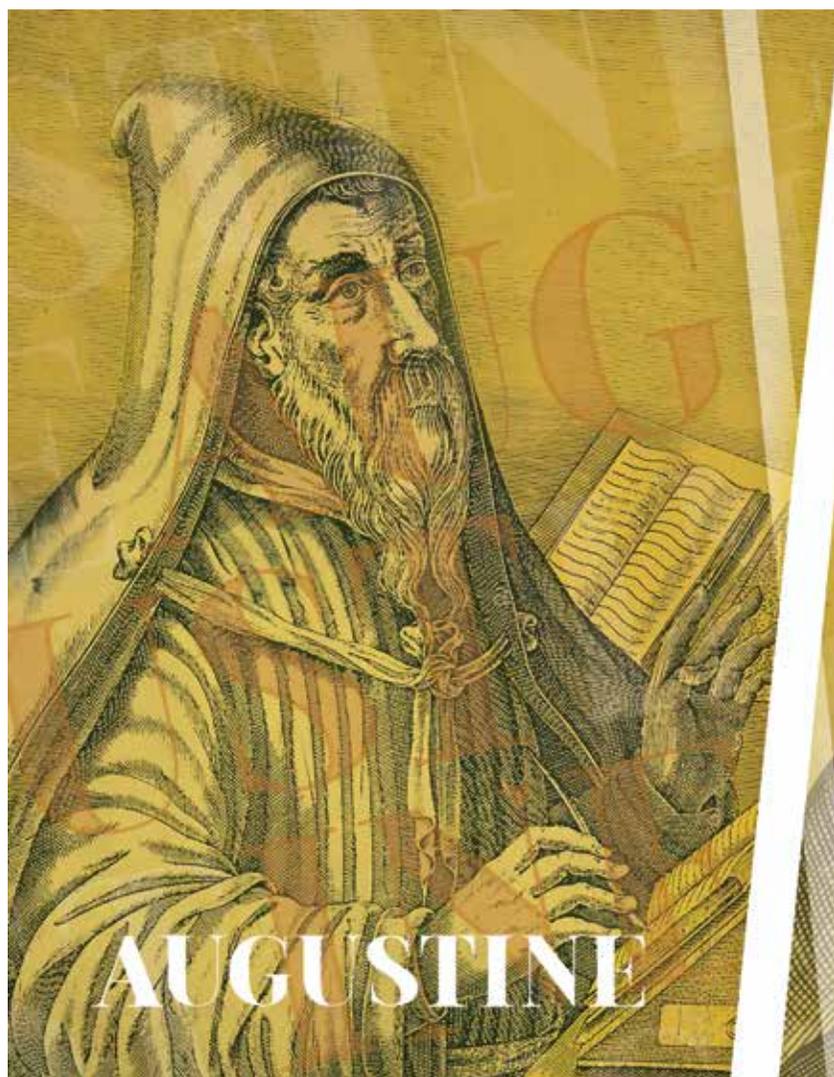
SOME PEOPLE THINK THE CONTROVERSY over Predestination and free will originated with John Calvin, the famous reformer. But it didn't. It can actually be traced back at least to the time of Augustine (AD 354–430), more than a thousand years earlier.

Contemplating the tension between divine Sovereignty and free will, and debating with his contemporary, Pelagius,¹ Augustine's views evolved over time. In the beginning, he taught that Predestination was conditional, being based on God's Foreknowledge of His Elect. In his later years,

however, he adopted the approach that would later influence Calvin—that is, that Predestination is unconditional. Augustine finally concluded that all human beings fall into one of two categories. We are either Elect (i.e., God's chosen ones) or reprobate (unchosen). God himself decided into which category each of us falls.² Calvin followed suit.

Was Augustine's latter position (Unconditional Election) an overreaction to Pelagius and his heretical salvation-by-works message? One can't help wondering whether that may have been the case.

One of the ironies here is that Augustine is regarded as a "doctor" and early "father" of the Roman Catholic Church. A millennium later, Calvin was one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation. These courageous reformers were protesting the abuses and errors of Catholicism; yet one of Calvin's core tenets (i.e., Unconditional Election) was largely derived from the teachings of Augustine, one of the founding "fathers" of Catholicism.

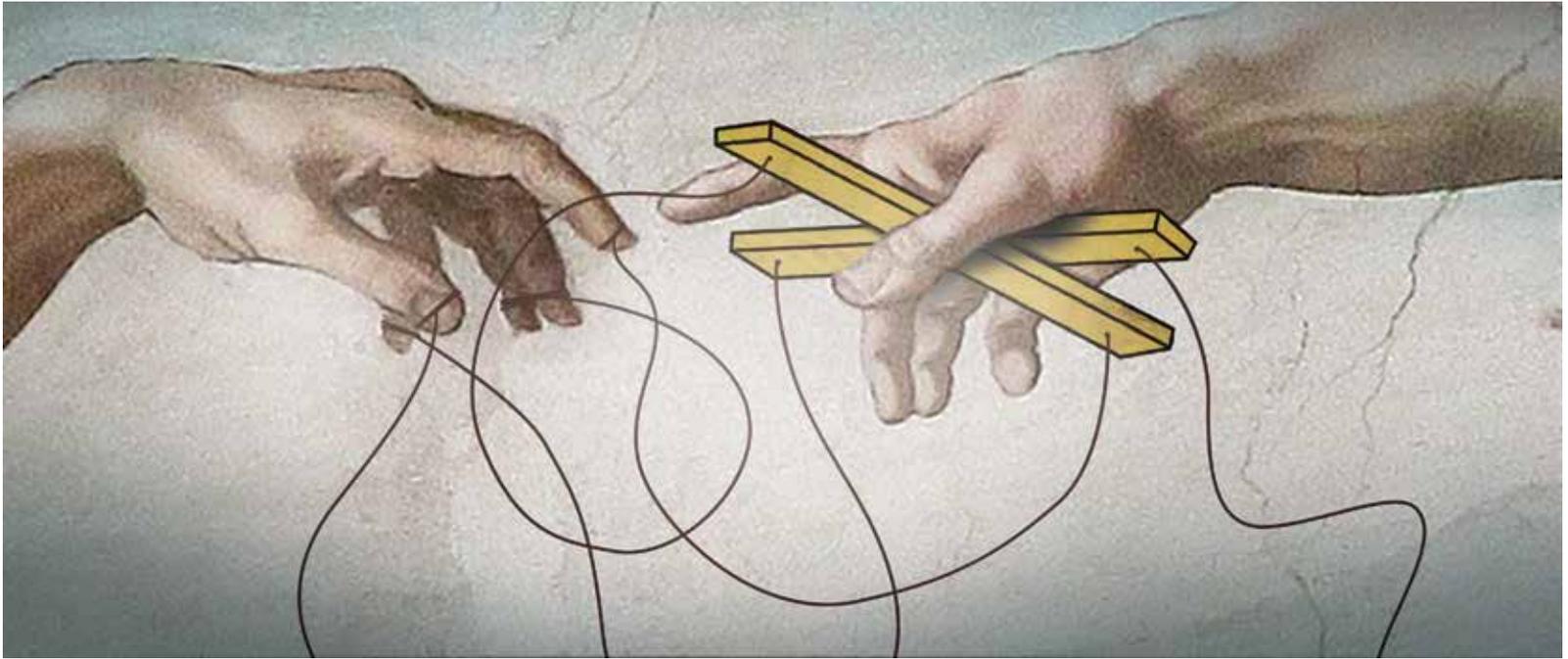


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Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*
Erastos Leiloglou, *Creative Director*



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DOES GOD CONTROL EVERYTHING?

In any case, Predestination vs. free will was a sticky issue in Calvin's day. On the one hand, the Bible portrays God as being sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful, and in control of all things. At the same time, however, Scripture explains that the Creation has been marred by sin and rebellion—both in Heaven and here on earth. Since the Fall, conditions here on earth have not been what God originally intended.

So, how did sin rear its ugly head in a universe where a benevolent God is sovereign and in control of all things? Isn't that a contradiction?

The obvious answer, at least for some Reformed thinkers, is that our sovereign God has granted His creatures (angels and humans) a measure of free will. We believe He allowed creaturely freedom because He didn't want a universe where everything was mechanical, predetermined, and boringly predictable.

Love was one of the things the Lord was going for. He didn't want His creatures to worship Him just because they were pre-programmed—like robots—to do so. He wanted our worship to flow naturally and spontaneously from hearts of love.

Calvin, however, opted for the predetermined approach. That is, the salvation of God's Elect (lit., "chosen ones") was decreed before the foundation of the world. The condemnation of the non-elect, in effect, was similarly decreed. So, some were chosen, and the rest were passed over.

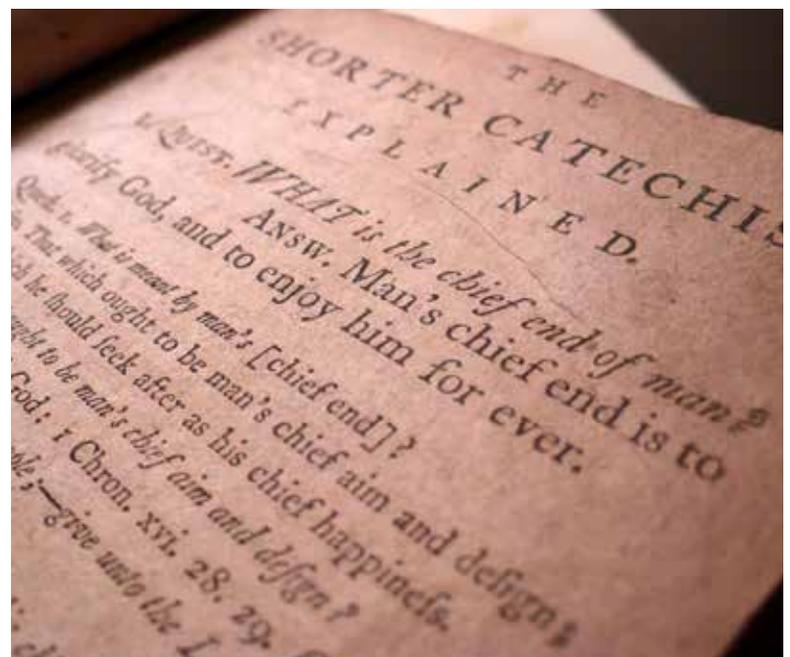
One of the questions in the Reformed *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is, "What are the decrees of God?" The answer states, "The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." In other words, everything that happens—whether good or bad—was decreed by God.

This was a problem for our Founder, Charles Halff. In the early 1950s, he was becoming increasingly unsettled about the teachings of some of his hyper-Calvinist preacher friends. He could not accept their idea that God sanctioned, decreed, or ordained evil—particularly an evil event like

the Holocaust, in which some of Charles' own relatives had perished. He insisted that the Jew-hating Nazis, not God, were responsible for *HaShoah*. Hitler and his cronies weren't going to get off the hook by blaming it on God.

It was around this time when a preacher friend in Fort Worth introduced young Charles to the writings of Charles H. Spurgeon (1834–1892). As he immersed himself in Spurgeon's teachings, he said it was like a breath of fresh air. From the very start, he found his heart and mind resonating with Spurgeon's Reformed, yet strongly evangelistic and balanced perspective.

Spurgeon was thoroughly Reformed, but he wasn't a five-point TULIP Calvinist—at least, not in the way some hyper-Calvinists interpret those five points. He didn't take divine Sovereignty to an extreme where it zeroed out human will and morphed into a form of "hard-shell" fatalism. He also didn't believe the Atonement was limited. He believed there is enough power and efficacy in the Lord's shed blood to save every man, woman, or child who ever lived, if only they would come to Him in faith.



Some of Spurgeon's views would be considered a bit radical by many evangelicals today. For instance, he wasn't reticent about expressing his view that someday, when the curtain falls on the stage of human history, there will be many more people in the Kingdom of God than there will be in Hell—many, many more, in fact. This was just one of several teachings that placed Spurgeon at odds with some fellow Calvinists in his day—especially those from the hyper-Calvinist camp.

Throughout his ministry in the 19th century, Spurgeon had to deal with criticism from his “hyper” critics.³ Some people said it was like a mouse trying to trip up a lumbering elephant; but still, for the always-busy Spurgeon, the constant pot-shots were no doubt annoying.

FIVE-POINT “TULIP” CALVINISM

The famous TULIP acronym reflects the English version of a formula that came out of the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands (1618–1619). This international council had been convened by the Dutch Reformed Church to confront the followers of Jacob (James) Arminius, who had split from the church because they disagreed with several key Calvinist positions. The following five points constituted the official Calvinist response to the five remonstrances (lit., “reasons for opposition”) of the Arminians. Calvin himself had died decades earlier (in 1564), so he never saw this TULIP formula:

T = Total Depravity
 U = Unconditional Election
 L = Limited Atonement
 I = Irresistible Grace
 P = Perseverance of the Saints



WHAT IS “HYPER-CALVINISM”?

So, who are these hyper-Calvinists, anyway? First, it's important to recognize that the Reformed/Calvinist world is not monolithic. It's populated by sincere believers with diverse views on topics like Predestination, Election, free will, and human responsibility. There are moderate Calvinists, for example, who don't embrace all five TULIP points. There are three-pointers, three-and-a-half pointers, and four-pointers, for example.

Then there are “consistent” Calvinists who embrace what some of them call “High Calvinism” and advocate for all five TULIP points. And John Piper, one of the founders of the New Calvinist Gospel Coalition (TGC), has carved out his own, unique category by claiming (somewhat tongue in cheek) that he's a “seven-point Calvinist.”⁴

Finally, there are hyper-Calvinists, many of whom don't bother to mask the unpleasant implications of the five points. To them, Hyper-Calvinism is perfectly normal and those of us who are in the moderate camp are the eccentric ones.

A Calvinist blogger named Phil Johnson has wisely captured the essence of Hyper-Calvinism in one concise statement. He says it's “a doctrine that emphasizes divine Sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility.”⁵

That's an excellent snapshot of Hyper-Calvinism. This “hyper” viewpoint takes divine Sovereignty to such an extreme, it effectively cancels out human free will and responsibility. By some accounts, it makes God ultimately responsible for everything, including sin.

FEW OR MANY IN HEAVEN?

C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon didn't go along with the conventional wisdom that says only a tiny minority of the human race will ultimately be saved. On the contrary, he taught that at the end of time, there will be more people—far more, in fact—in Heaven than there will be in Hell.

Here's how he explained it in a sermon he preached in 1855 on Matthew 8:11–12:

But my text hath a yet greater depth of sweetness, for it says, that “many shall come and shall sit down.” Some narrow-minded bigots think that heaven will be a very small place, where there will be a very few people, who went to their chapel or their church. I confess, I have no wish for a very small heaven, and love to read in the Scriptures that there are many mansions in my Father's house. How often do I hear people say, “Ah! strait is the gate and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it. There will be very few in heaven; there will be most lost.”

My friend, I differ from you. Do you think that Christ will let the devil beat him? That he will let the devil have more in hell than there will be in heaven? No; it is impossible. For then Satan would laugh at Christ. There will be more in heaven than there are among the lost. God says, that “there will be a number that no man can number who will be saved”; but he never says, that there will be a number that no man can number that will be lost. There will be a host beyond all count who will get into heaven.

What glad tidings for you and for me! For, if there are so many to be saved, why should not I be saved? Why should not you? Why should not yon man, over there in the crowd, say, “Cannot I be one among the multitude?” And may not that poor woman there take heart, and say, “Well, if there were but half-a-dozen saved, I might fear that I should not be one; but, since many are to come, why should not I also be saved?”

Cheer up, disconsolate! Cheer up, son of mourning, child of sorrow, there is hope for thee still! I can never know that any man is past God's grace. There be a few that have sinned that sin that is unto death, and God gives them up; but the vast host of mankind are yet within the reach of sovereign mercy—“and many of them shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.”

—Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Heaven and Hell” (The New Park Street Pulpit, sermon No. 39–40, delivered on Tuesday evening, Sept. 4, 1855, in an open-air meeting in a field on King Edward's Road, Hackney).

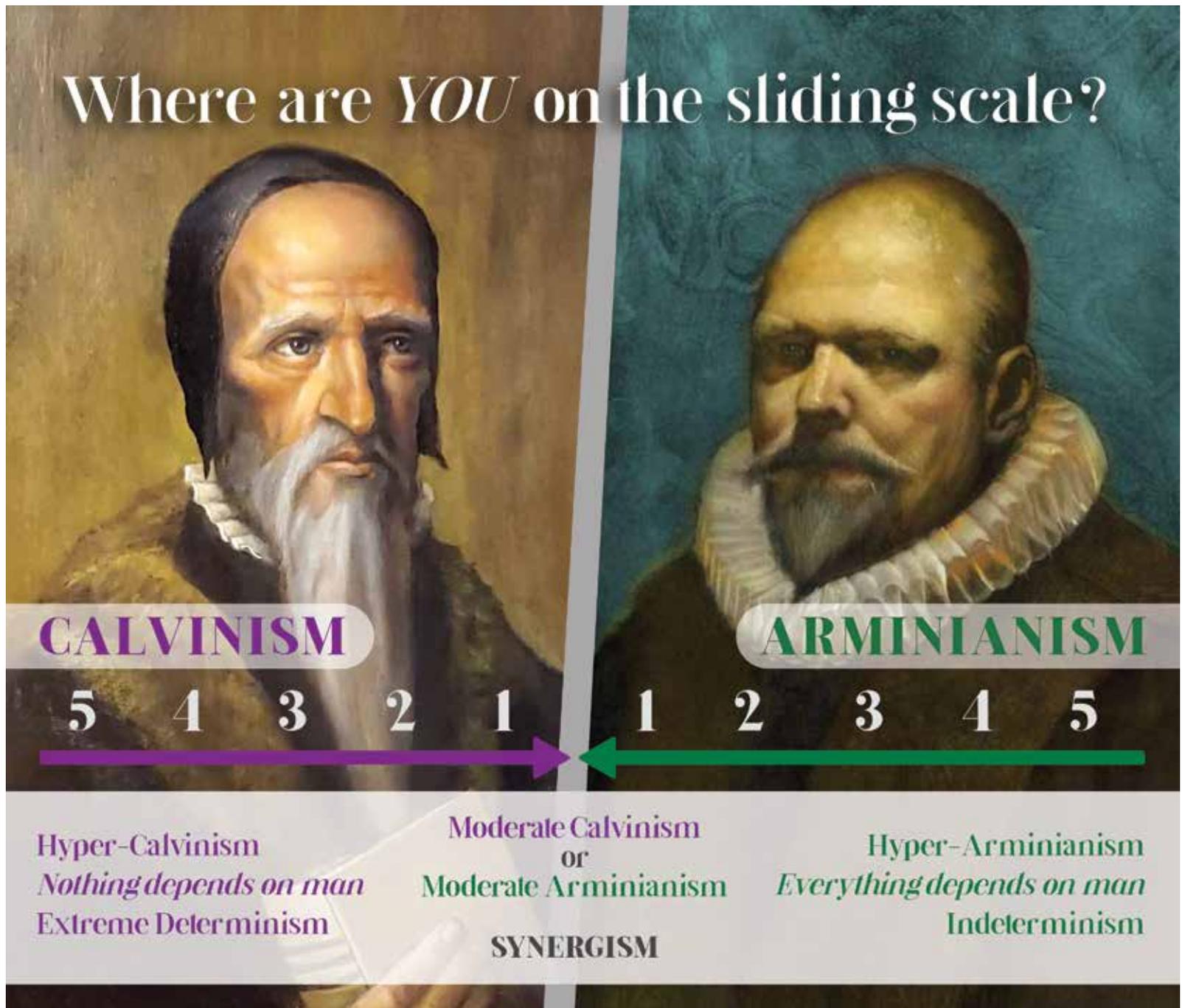
The “hyper” viewpoint, then, leaves virtually no room for human free will. It says God has laid out everything in advance by His predestinating decree(s).⁶ We saw earlier that this is precisely what *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* says. Most Calvinists don’t take it literally, of course, but some do. There are hyper-Calvinists, for instance, who say that **God causes everything that happens**—including sin and the tragedy of the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

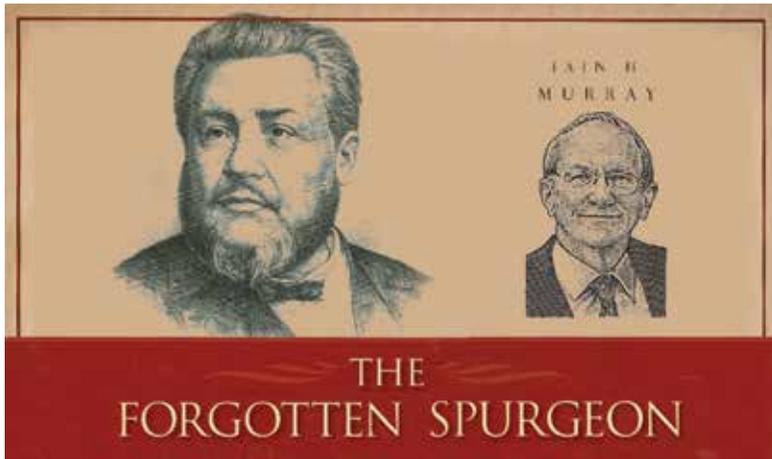
But that’s not all. The “hypers” say that even though Adam had no choice but to disobey God in the Garden (because God had decreed for the Fall to happen), he was nonetheless accountable for that sin. So, according to them, Adam was guilty even though he and Eve were carrying out God’s predetermined plan. The “hypers” then expand this principle to apply more widely to all the descendants of Adam (that’s us). That is, we have all inherited Adam’s guilt for a sin he couldn’t help but commit. They may try to sidestep it or mystify it; but at the end of the day, that’s exactly what they’re saying.⁷

THE SLIDING SCALE OF SOTERIOLOGY

The “hyper” position, then, is one of two dueling viewpoints. At one extreme are the monergists,⁸ hyper-Calvinists who say that salvation is all of God, with no human initiative or involvement of any kind. (A common mantra is, “We don’t choose God; He chooses us.”) At the opposite end of the spectrum are non-Calvinists who over-play the role of human freedom—as in extreme versions of Arminianism. These folks portray God as sort of a heavenly Figure who watches over His creatures and wants us to receive His Son as Savior, but pretty much leaves us to find our way to Him with our powers of reasoning and logic.⁹

Those are the two opposing ends of the spectrum—Hyper-Calvinism and a sort of Hyper-Arminianism. For the rest of us, the truth lies somewhere in the middle, where God (the Giver) and man (the receiver) come together synergistically, with the Lord’s prevenient grace aiding and energizing the divine-human encounter via the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).





SPURGEON'S BALANCED APPROACH

In retrospect, it's easy to see why young Charles Halff found solace and encouragement in the writings of Spurgeon. In the midst of all the theological polarization and turmoil of the 19th century, London's "Prince of Preachers" had confidently charted a steady, biblical course that avoided the extremes.

In his book *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, Iain Murray (founder of the Banner of Truth Trust in the UK) describes how Spurgeon was relentlessly harangued by his "hyper" critics in the 1800s. In a helpful review of Murray's book, Calvinist blogger Ray Ortland summarizes the four points over which (according to Murray) Spurgeon tussled with the hyper-Calvinists:¹⁰

1. "Genuine evangelical Christianity is never of an exclusive spirit. Any view of the truth which undermines catholicity¹¹ has gone astray from Scripture." According to Murray, **Spurgeon disagreed with hyper-Calvinists who "made faith in election a part of saving faith and thus either denied the Christianity of all professed Christians who did not so believe or at least treated such profession with much suspicion."**
2. Spurgeon "wanted to see both divine sovereignty and human responsibility upheld, but **when it came to gospel preaching, he believed that there needed to be a greater concentration upon responsibility.** The tendency of Hyper-Calvinism was to make sinners want to understand theology before they could believe in Christ."
3. "This controversy [between Spurgeon and his hyper-Calvinist critics] directs us to our need for profound humility before God. It reminds us forcefully of questions about which we can only say, 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not' (Job 36:26)." Murray further observed, "It is to be feared that sharp contentions between Christians on these issues have too often arisen from a wrong confidence in our powers of reasoning and our assumed ability to draw logical inferences." Spurgeon evidently noted the irony inherent in **"a system which sought to attribute all to the grace of God [but at the same time] had itself too much confidence in the powers of reason."**
4. "The final conclusion has to be that when Calvinism ceases to be evangelistic, when it becomes more concerned with theory than with the salvation of men and women, **when acceptance of doctrines seems to become more important than acceptance of Christ, then it is a system going to seed and it will invariably lose its attractive power.**"¹²

That's how Spurgeon managed to avoid the errors of Hyper-Calvinism while dealing with his critics and still maintaining a strong, Reformed testimony.

SO, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

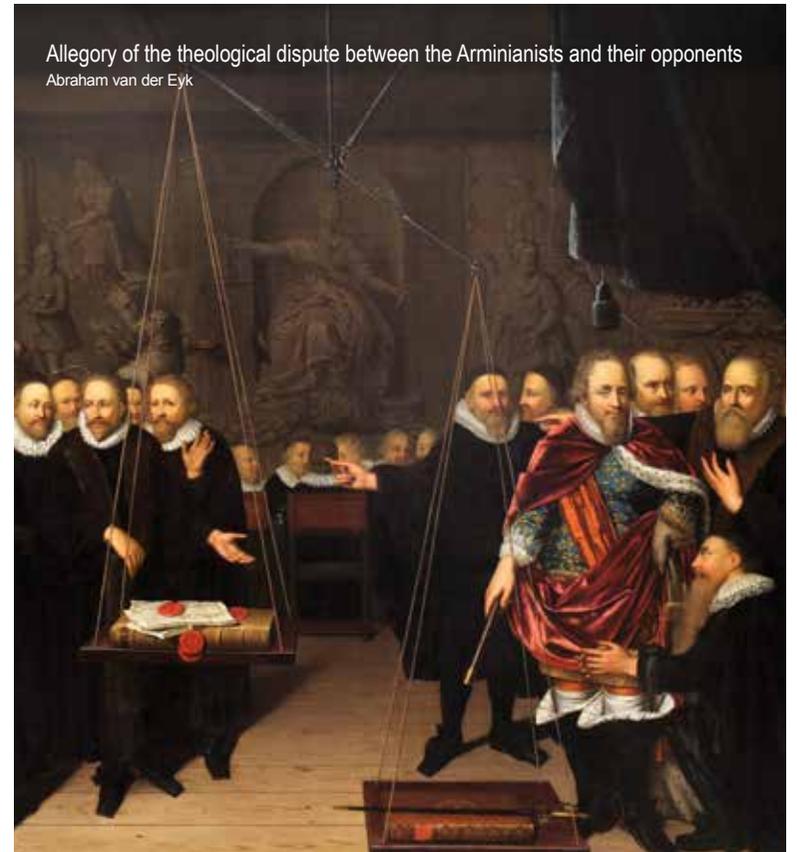
There's really no problem with Election or Predestination per se.¹³ The Bible teaches these concepts. Even mainstream Arminians affirm them. There is substantial agreement on this. The Apostle Paul lays it out clearly:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-6, emphasis added).



Predestination itself, properly understood, shouldn't be controversial. It didn't become a point of contention until Calvin (taking his cues from Augustine a thousand years earlier) decided it had to be **unconditional**. If Election is unconditional, then so are salvation and Predestination. These concepts are all inseparable. And if Predestination (i.e., Election) is unconditional, then so is its evil twin, Reprobation (Double Predestination).

So, unconditional Predestination and Double Predestination (i.e., Reprobation) go hand-in-hand. You can't have one without the other. And like we said earlier, Augustine taught both in his later years.

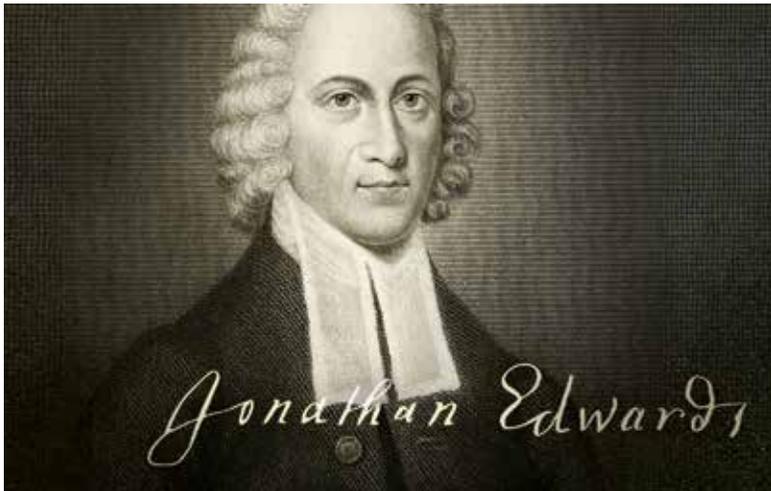
Unconditionality, then, is where the difficulty lies. Calvin said that God's choice of His people (that is, Election) was not predicated on anything we would ever say, believe, or do—no conditions of any kind. In insisting on unconditionality, Calvin was inferring that there's nothing for us to believe in, repent of, or confess—at least, not until after we're saved—because God does it all. But is that really what the Bible tells us? Is it true that we play no role in our salvation?

NO HUMAN MERIT

It is generally agreed that Calvin had good intentions when he adopted Augustine's view of absolute and unconditional Predestination. Like his forerunner, Calvin was wanting to obliterate the idea that there is any role for human merit or works in salvation.¹⁴

We should all affirm that there's nothing we can do to save ourselves—because it's true. God has provided for our salvation through the sacrificial offering of His Son on Calvary. When Yeshua cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He meant that there's nothing we can do—that is, **no works of any kind**—to add to His work of Redemption.

Some people seem to think that salvation comes with an installment plan—that is, the Lord paid the down payment, but we have to keep up the installments. But that's not what God says in His Word. What He says is that our Redemption has been paid **in full** by Yeshua the Messiah.



This means that we contribute nothing to our salvation. When we come to God, we bring nothing of any value to the table. It's a faith transaction in which we exchange our sin for His righteousness—and that's it. As someone has fittingly observed, "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan preacher-philosopher, said it like this:

You are invited to come to Christ, heartily to close with Him, and trust in Him for salvation; and if you do so, you shall have the benefit of this glorious contrivance. You shall have the benefit of all, as much as if the whole had been contrived for you alone. God has already contrived everything that is needful for your salvation; and **there is nothing wanting but your consent.**¹⁶

Notice that Edwards said our "consent" (that is, our faith in the Lord and His work on Calvary) is all that's needed.

IS OUR CONSENT A "WORK"?

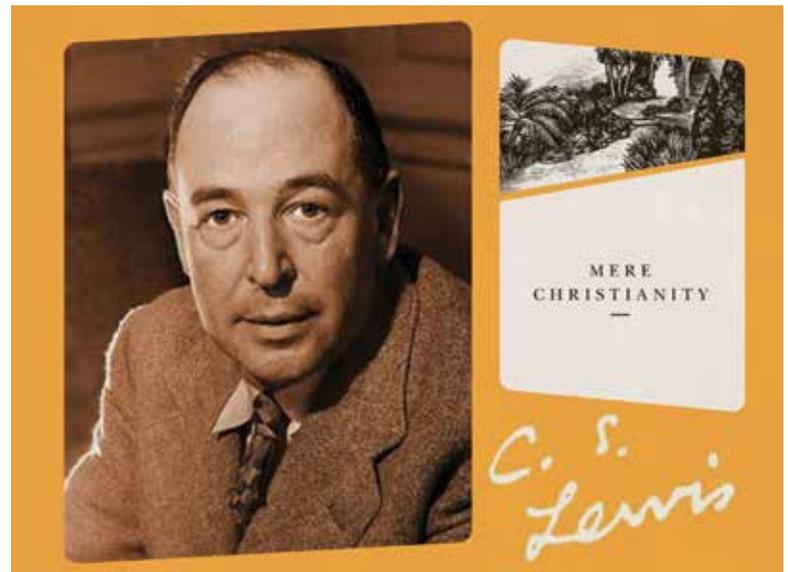
Some hyper-Calvinists disagree with Edwards' idea of "consent," or faith. One of their strange notions is that there is no such thing as "saving faith." They say no one is capable of exercising faith until **after** salvation. Their biblical basis for this is passages like Ephesians 2:9, which stipulate that salvation is "not of works." Our "hyper" friends claim that faith in God and confession of sin are human "works" and are therefore associated with sanctification (i.e., after salvation), not justification (at the moment of salvation). So, to them, belief and confession don't come into play until **after** salvation.

It's certainly true that belief (faith) is an important part of the Christian life. We sometimes refer to ourselves as "believers," do we not? Think about this: Our identity is based on an action word ("believe," a verb) rather than a noun. So, we **are** what we **do** (and vice versa). We believe and confess on a daily, moment-by-moment basis (1 John 1:7–9).¹⁷ Belief and confession, then, are both part of the ongoing process of spiritual growth and **sanctification**. We agree on this.

However, here's where we part ways with our "hyper" friends. Belief and confession aren't just for sanctification. The Bible says they're for justification, too: *For with the heart one **believes** unto righteousness, and with the mouth **confession** is made **unto salvation*** (Rom. 10:10).

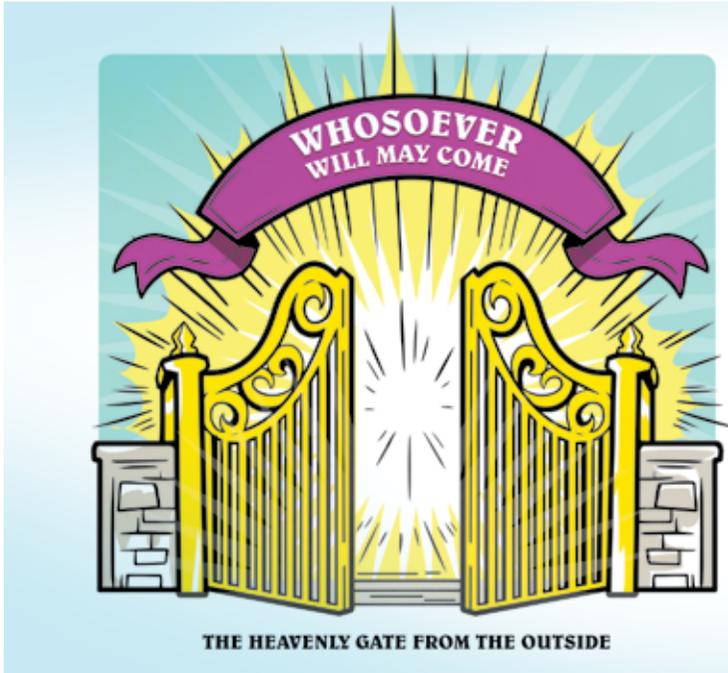
In order to be saved, we must **believe** the Gospel and **confess** (that is, agree with God about) our sin. This is part and parcel of a biblical salvation experience. But belief and confession aren't "works of righteousness." Our "hyper" friends are wrong about this.

In another passage, Paul says we're not saved "by works of righteousness which we have done" (Titus 3:5). Again, he's not talking about our response to the Lord via faith and confession. When Paul tells Titus about these works that can't save us, he's referring to legalism—that is, "the works of the law," human efforts that are mistakenly thought to produce personal righteousness (Gal. 2:16). This is precisely the opposite of what belief and confession are about.



The Gospel requires—actually, it demands—consent before anyone can be saved. No one can honestly claim neutrality when it comes to Yeshua. We have to choose one way or the other. As C.S. Lewis famously pointed out, we're either for Him, or we're against Him:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹⁸



THE GOSPEL IS FOR “THE WHOLE WORLD”

While we’re on the topic of Hyper-Calvinism, we should also note that many “hypers” say it’s wrong to preach the Gospel to the non-elect because they couldn’t be saved even if they wanted to be. Inviting “unchosen” people to respond to the Gospel, they say, is like “casting your pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6).

This objection notwithstanding, however, we believe the Gospel should be preached to everyone. At the same time, we are well aware that some who hear it will reject it. But we don’t know in advance who those non-elect people are—so we preach it to everyone. Spurgeon agreed:

If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies; and if they perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.¹⁹

Yes, God wants every lost person to be warned. Why? Because they don’t have to be condemned. The hyper-Calvinists are dead wrong when they say that God has decreed that certain people must be lost. On the contrary, He has lovingly and mercifully cleared the way for them to be justified—and that justification takes place when they are touched by God’s grace and they exercise saving faith (Rom. 5:1). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b).

The Apostle John put the issue to rest for time and eternity when he wrote: *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world* (1 John 2:2).

Yes, that means salvation is conditional—not unconditional. The condition is trusting in Yeshua. Redemption has been purchased by the Lord, so anyone who wants to be saved can be.

Conversely, the condition for condemnation is rejecting Him. But no one has to be lost if they don’t want to be.

HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY PERSPECTIVES

Predestination is salvation from a heavenly perspective. It’s what God sees from His eternal vantage point. Free will, on the other hand, looks at these issues from an earthly perspective. It’s what we see from our time-bound, human viewpoint.

Both perspectives are true! It’s just two different ways of looking at the same thing.

D.L. Moody, the famous evangelist, had an illustration to show how the two perspectives complement each other. He suggested that someday, as we (hypothetically) approach Heaven, the emblem over the gate might have this invitation: “WHOSOEVER WILL MAY COME.”

Once we pass through the gate, however, and we turn around and look back up—the reverse side of that same emblem will read: “ELECT ACCORDING TO THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.”

So, again, it’s a matter of perspective!

That famous passage in John 3:16–18 brings even more clarity to this issue of who can be saved:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John doesn’t leave much wiggle-room there, does he? If we made this passage into a catechism, it might look something like this:

Whom does God love? *The world (that’s anyone and everyone).*

Who can be saved? *Anyone who hears the Good News and believes it.*

Who is not condemned? *Anyone who believes in God’s Son.*

Who is condemned? *Those who do not believe in the Name of Yeshua, the Son of God.*

“No one will be able to look up from Hell and say to God, ‘I am here because You didn’t want me.’”



The Bible, then, clearly says that God loves the world and gave His Son to redeem anyone and everyone who would ever believe in Him. That’s Bible, dear reader.

Here in our improvised Messianic catechism, does John say that some people are condemned because God doesn’t want them? That, of course, would put the onus on God. **It would mean that it’s God’s fault they’re not saved, not theirs.** However, that’s not what John says. He says they’re not saved because they refuse to believe in Him. The implication is, very clearly, that they **could** believe; but in the exercise of their free will, they choose **not** to believe. They don’t **want** to believe.

Charles Halff himself may have summed it up best with something he used to say whenever we were talking about Election (for the saved) and Reprobation (for the lost). He found all of the theories and possibilities about these matters interesting, and he was always up for a good theological discussion. However, he would remind us that at the end of the day, there was one thing we could say with absolute certainty: **“No one will be able to look up from Hell and say to God, ‘I am here because You didn’t want me.’”**

It’s that simple, my friend. Yeshua-believers are the Elect (lit., God’s “chosen” ones). Yeshua-rejecters remain unchosen because they refuse to believe. 



Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.

¹ Pelagius (354–418) was the consummate humanistic theologian. He said there’s no such thing as inherited original sin and that we are capable of choosing good even without God’s help (grace). We perfect ourselves and grow holy by imitating Jesus, according to Pelagius—essentially, we can achieve our own salvation in this way. Some Calvinists consider him the originator of a heresy they call “free will theology.” However, many moderate Calvinists believe in a measure of creaturely freedom which can be inclined godward, against the grain of original sin, by the application of divine grace. The teachings of Pelagius survive in the 21st century in the form of the “salvation by works” gospel embraced by liberal churches and denominations.

² “Predestination” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), Allen D. Fitzgerald, OSF, Ed.

³ See Ian H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010).

⁴ Matt Perman, “What Does Piper Mean When He Says He’s a Seven-Point Calvinist?” (Jan. 23, 2006) on the *Desiring God* blogsite (desiringgod.org). According to Perman’s editorial, Piper says the sixth TULIP point is “double predestination” (i.e., Reprobation) and the seventh is “the best-of-all possible worlds.”

⁵ Phillip R. Johnson, “A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism,” accessed in October 2020 on his blogsite at romans45.org. Phil is on staff at *Grace to You* in Southern California.

⁶ Many hyper-Calvinists talk about one divine decree (singular) rather than numerous decrees. To them, all of God’s elective work was part of the same predestinating decree.

⁷ Mystification is a tactic some “hypers” resort to when they find themselves confronted by a dissonant conclusion that’s difficult to defend—like the one that says God “ordained” sin. They dismiss it by saying it’s a mystery that’s beyond our human powers of logic and reason.

⁸ In Calvinism, “Monergism” (lit., “one [at] work”) means that God works alone to bring about an individual’s salvation, without that person’s assent or participation in any way. It says that God does the choosing because man is incapable of doing so. There is nothing for the individual to repent of, assent to, or believe in. The contrasting concept to Monergism is Synergism.

⁹ Extreme versions of Arminianism could be compared to an ancient heresy known as Semi-Pelagianism.

¹⁰ See *TGC U.S. Edition*, the online blog of *The Gospel Coalition* (Feb. 8, 2017), accessed at thegospelcoalition.org. These four points are adapted from that blog.

¹¹ Murray uses the term “catholicity” here to mean the “universality” of truth. It’s not a reference to the Catholic Church.

¹² Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism* (Banner of Truth: Edinburgh, 1995), 110–122. Emphasis in bold added.

¹³ Election and Predestination are interrelated concepts. Election emphasizes the divine action (that is, God choosing those whom He knows are His Elect) while Predestination points to the result. The destiny of the Elect, it turns out, has been secured since “before the foundation of the world” because of their faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

¹⁴ Remember, Augustine’s theology of salvation had been, to some degree, a formulaic response to the dangerous Pelagian (salvation-by-works) teaching of his day.

¹⁵ This quote has been attributed to Phillip Melancthon (the famous figure in Lutheran history) and others, but without certainty.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards, Volume 4* (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1852), 166.

¹⁷ The present active indicative form of the Greek verb *katharizo* (καθαρίζω) in 1 John 1:7 indicates present, continuing action (rather than a one-time event). This parsing of the verb tells us that cleansing “from all sin” (*apo pases hamartias*) is an ongoing process in a Christian’s life (i.e., sanctification). Salvation is deliverance (at the moment of salvation) from the **penalty** of sin; sanctification is deliverance (now) from the **power** of sin; and glorification is deliverance (someday, in Heaven) from the **presence** of sin.

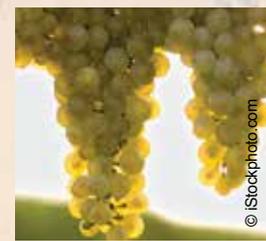
¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1971), 52.

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, “The Wailing of Risca” in *The New Park Street Pulpit* (a sermon preached on Sunday, December 9, 1860, at Exeter Hall, on the Strand in London).

Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



Free from the Occult

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), shared about a long-standing 15-year friendship with “Darren” and his family through homeschooling. Darren’s family moved away, but Richard and Oanh always stayed in touch. They were concerned when they became aware that Darren was getting involved with drugs, alcohol, a partying lifestyle, and witchcraft. Rich engaged him on Facebook and continued to share Jesus and encourage him. Darren asked Rich for his phone number and called him a month later. He told Rich that he had attempted suicide, ended up in a hospital and subsequently became free of drugs and alcohol and gave up on witchcraft. Rich praised the Lord for Darren’s accomplishments, but also told him that there was one more thing Darren needed to do in order to have a personal relationship with the Lord. Rich shared the Gospel message with him, and Darren prayed to renounce witchcraft and to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Darren said that he sensed a release when the demons were cast out of his life, and now he is growing in the Lord and posting things about Jesus on Facebook. Rich asks that we please pray for Darren’s continued sanctification.

Chanukah on Zoom

CJFM representative Diann Parkas (New Jersey), like many serving the Lord during this pandemic shutdown, was challenged in how and where to offer a Chanukah event without any local in-person gatherings. (Due to the shutdown and delay in printing this periodical, we are looking back to 2020.) She wanted it to be participatory and fun, as well as instructive, and thus offered a Chanukah event on Zoom. Diann incorporated a Chanukah game, a craft, and music along with her Messiah centered teaching and celebration of the holiday. She was thrilled that 27 people joined and that four of them were unsaved Jewish individuals. It was the first time one of the women, with whom she has been cultivating a relationship for quite a few years, had ever attended a Messianic event. Please pray for more opportunities for Diann to creatively share the Gospel message.

Let Them Hear

Michael Campo, Jr., CJFM representative (Chicago), spent the entire year of 2020 (and now 2021) teaching 25 believers the book of Revelation verse by verse on a weekly Zoom meeting. He is blessed that the participants in his Zoom meeting have invited their unsaved family and friends to join them in their study. In doing so, they will hear from the Word what God says about their future if they do not repent and believe the Gospel message.

Recently, the Lord has brought three unsaved people into Michael’s life at a health club he visits daily. He praises God that, during their conversations concerning all kinds of social issues, he has had opportunities to share biblical prophecy and his trust in Jesus. Please pray that their daily discussions and new friendships would lead these individuals to His saving grace.

Apologetics

Eric Chabot, CJFM Midwest representative (Columbus, OH), continues to hold weekly Zoom meetings focusing on “Apologetics: Why we need it and common objections about the validity and usage of apologetics.” When the schools are open, Eric leads campus ministries on apologetics at Ohio State University and Columbus State University. The Zoom meetings are a part of the equipping and educating aspect of his ministry, which emphasizes three E’s: Evangelizing, Equipping and Educating. Eric invites guest speakers, mainly Christian authors, to discuss their books, dealing with topics such as, “God’s Existence,” “The Argument for Divine Revelation,” “Revisiting the Moral Argument,” “The Trinity and Deity of the Messiah,” “A Look at Jewish Objections to Jesus,” etc. If you are interested in joining these interesting and educational Zoom meetings, email ericc@cjfm.org

OP and BC Ministries

Larry Dubin, CJFM representative (Florida), shares some thoughts about proclaiming and sharing the Gospel during this Covid-19 crisis which put an end to public gatherings. Online platforms (OP), mainly Zoom meetings/Bible studies, have been the primary method for evangelism and teaching. Larry writes, “these online meetings will never replace the mandate as recorded in Hebrews 10:25 of gathering together in order to encourage one another as the biblical story unfolds, yet they remain a viable option for life and ministry during the pandemic.” However, there is another method which allows people to gather safely. Larry calls this his “beach chair (BC) ministry.” During his 20 years in ministry, Larry has been transporting two beach chairs from LA to DC to South Florida, which were previously stored in a closet. However, as a result of the C-19 shutdown and the restrictions on face-to-face meetings, these two beach chairs have become a very important part of his ministry. The C-19 guidelines from officials advise that people stay at least six feet apart from each other. During the past year, Larry has been sitting in his beach chair near a shade tree meeting with people, discussing and studying the Word of God, while also encouraging them and praying with them. He says, “these individuals cherish the eye-to-eye contact in a socially distant arrangement. Covid-19 may create some challenging moments to share the Gospel, but OP and BC are two ways to proclaim the Faith and demonstrate the Hope we have in Messiah Jesus. They allow us opportunities to carry out Yeshua’s mandate, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’” (Matthew 28:19).

PTL!

Violette Berger, CJFM representative and staff writer (Scottsdale, AZ)—Thank you! I asked for prayer for an unsaved Jewish woman who began attending our Messianic fellowship, *Tikvah BaMidbar* (Hope in the Desert) for the Fall feasts, and praise God for her salvation. She shared her newfound faith with us following our Chanukah service/celebration. Please pray for her spiritual growth (God knows who she is) as she continues to attend our Bible study and for wisdom and courage in sharing the Gospel with family and friends. 🙏

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *I learned a lot from your article about New Calvinism, but I'm still a little bit hazy on the TULIP points and whether or not we should accept all five of them. It doesn't sound like you're a five-pointer.*

ANSWER: As you know, the five points of “consistent” Calvinism form an acrostic that spells the word TULIP. What many Calvinists don't know, however, is that those five points didn't originate with Calvin; in fact, they were formulated at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), a church-sponsored council held in the Netherlands more than half a century after Calvin's death. Not only did he never see the five points, but there is also some debate among Reformed scholars as to whether Calvin himself would have agreed with all five of the TULIP points—at least, in the way they are commonly interpreted today.

The five points are:

1. Total Depravity
2. Unconditional Election
3. Limited Atonement
4. Irresistible Grace
5. Perseverance of the Saints

You're right—I'm not a full, five-point Calvinist. My position on each point is as follows:

1. I believe in Total Depravity in its original sense, but not in the exaggerated, hyper-Calvinist sense (that is, so-called “worm theology”). In modern English, the word “depravity” has an almost subhuman (think “Hannibal Lecter”) connotation. What Calvin meant by “total depravity,” though, is less extreme. He taught that the Fall (in the Garden of Eden) marred and distorted human nature to the point where we can do nothing in our own strength to please God. It does **not** mean that the *Imago Dei* (“Image of God”) was eradicated in humans, that we have no conscience, or that we're incapable of doing anything good whatsoever before we come to faith. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in fact, Calvin confirmed that the Image of God continues in us, albeit corrupted into a “frightful deformity” (I.15.4). That is, post-Fall humanity is only a distorted shadow of what we were before the Fall. However, the Apostle Paul says that what the first Adam lost (through sin) is being restored by the last Adam, *Messiah Yeshua* (1 Cor. 15:45–49). So, for this first point, I'll say I'm in 75 percent agreement.

2. I believe in Election (that is, God's choice of those whom He will save and bring into His family); however, I believe it's more conditional than it is unconditional. In fact, **salvation and condemnation are both conditional**. The condition for salvation is faith and the condition for condemnation is unbelief. John unpacks this teaching in three

simple but powerful verses: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*” (John 3:16–18, emphasis added). Since I affirm half of this one (Election, but not unconditionality), it gets 50 percent.

3. I believe in the Atonement, of course; but it's not limited only to a certain few. I agree with Spurgeon's position on this. He wrote, “I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus. If my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, I dare not, allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind, it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ's finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed their Maker's law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question.”¹ We'll also give this one 50 percent.

4. I agree that God's free and unmerited grace is essential (Eph. 2:8), enabling us to respond to the drawing and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44), as we come to faith in the Son of God. However, the Spirit's convicting work can be resisted (Gen. 6:3; Acts 7:51). The writer of the Epistle to the Jewish Christians (Hebrews) reminds his readers, *While it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion”* (3:15).² So, rather than “irresistible grace,” a better term might be “efficacious grace,” which means that God is God, and He effectively accomplishes all He intends to do. And what is His intention? It's to save anyone and everyone who will come to Him in faith: *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out* (John 6:37).

At the same time, though, He doesn't force Himself on us. He wants our love, not merely lemming-like conformity. C.S. Lewis, the 20th-century Christian philosopher and Cambridge professor, said that in the end, there will be only be two kinds of people: first, those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and second, those to whom God says, “**Thy will be done.**” So, once again, we'll say this one registers roughly 50 percent.

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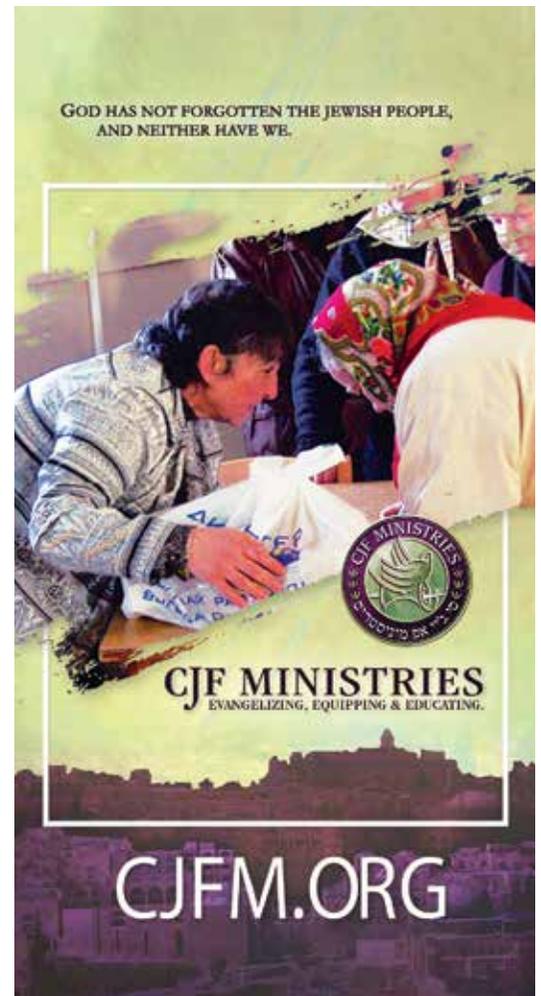
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5. Finally, I believe in the Perseverance of the Saints. Some people prefer the term “preservation of the saints” because it puts more emphasis on God’s grace and His work in our lives, rather than making it sound like we’re just desperately trying to hang on until the end. How dismal that would be! In contrast, Paul exuded a tone of optimism when he said, *Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you **will complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:6, emphasis added). The Lord always finishes what He starts! That’s the basis of our assurance.

There’s a difference between a mere **professor** (whose faith is mostly talk) and a real **possessor**—because a true believer (or, practitioner) will continue in the faith. If he falls into sin, God will discipline him, like any earthly parent does, to bring him back into line (Heb. 12:3–11). Anyone who falls by the wayside permanently, with no evidence of divine discipline, does so because he was never a true believer in the first place. The Apostle John says this was something that had happened even in the early church: *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us* (1 John 2:19). We’ll rank this final point at 100 percent.

So, those are the five points of TULIP Calvinism. Add up the scores and it looks like I’m a three-and-a-quarter-point Calvinist—definitely not a five-pointer. We have friends who are two-pointers, three-pointers, three-and-a-half pointers, and four-pointers. And yes, some are five-pointers. John Piper has said he’s a seven-pointer, so he has outdone us all! Three-and-a-quarter points is a bit unusual; but it puts me in the same category as people like Richard Land of Southern Seminary, among others, so I’m in good company.³



¹ C.H. Spurgeon, Susannah Spurgeon, and Joseph Harrald, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon: Volume 1, 1834–1854*, Chapter 16: “A Defense of Calvinism” (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1898), 175.

² The quote in Hebrews 3:15 is from Psalm 95:7–8.

³ Richard Land, “A quick tutorial on Calvinism’s five points and why I’m only a ‘three-and-a-quarter pointer’” in *Christian Examiner* (Nov. 7, 2016). Accessed at christianexaminer.com.