

DO I WANT TO BE REFORMED?
The Origins and Definitions of “Reformed Theology”
As A Distinct Movement in the Christian Church

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Introduction

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) calls itself, “Reformed.” Though certainly not the only denomination holding to this theology, those claiming to be Reformed are a small subset of the catholic¹ or universal church. But what does it mean to be “Reformed”? It sounds like reform school, that hated place where social workers discipline young offenders. Fortunately, the PCA intends something quite different! To explain, we begin by comparing Reformed theology to other theological systems, with an emphasis on how it developed in the course of church history.

It is impossible to cover in a few pages what it means to be Reformed, to be living in the 21st century, and to be a member of an American denomination.² Yet I have found that a simple overview helps me get my bearings before beginning a more in-depth study. Therefore, I offer this broad outline of the issues associated with the Reformation.

Reformed as Distinct from Roman Catholic

“The Reformation” Begins

In the years prior to the 1500s, it became clear that the church needed correction. Unhappily, abuses of authority by some pastors and priests became notorious and massive during this period. Many complained; however, poor communication, combined with the efforts of state governments to squelch such protests,³ eliminated the possibility of widespread acceptance of these earliest efforts to reform the church.

¹ The word “catholic” means “of broad scope; comprehensive; including or concerning all humankind; universal.” Only when capitalized is the word being used as a shortened form for the Roman Catholic church.

² The issues concerning the reform of the church from the late medieval ages to the present Reformed denominations in America are extremely complex. Many books should be studied if your interest is peaked by this paper. I especially recommend Alister McGrath’s *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) which well fulfills the author’s stated aim of introducing, explaining, and contextualizing the European Reformation.

³ The relation between government and religion was an intimate one at this time. In fact, it is impossible to understand the Reformation without studying the religious issues. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 1, states, “It is understandably difficult for a student sympathetic to the secularism of modern western culture to come to terms with a movement motivated by religious ideas.... The Reformation in Switzerland and Germany was directly based upon religious ideas which demand and deserve consideration. Even in England, where local conditions led to political factors having greater influence than religious ideas, there was still a significant core of such ideas underlying developments.”

Eventually though, Martin Luther, a priest and professor at the University of Wittenberg (Germany) heard of some of the abuses⁴ and officially protested against them.⁵ And with the help of Gutenberg's recently invented printing press, the depth and seriousness of the problems in the church were widely disseminated for the first time. As a result, many other pastors joined Luther in criticizing church leadership.

We should note here that those who "protested"⁶ called themselves "Reformers" rather than "Protestants."⁷ Luther (and those working alongside him) never sought to split the church. Their goal was reform, removing the faults and abuses which made the church unbiblical, "turning the church from...worldliness and a lack of proper theological emphasis, and it did not...entail the notion of separation from the one church."⁸ However, Luther *did* insist that the Roman Catholic Church was in error; and his persistent belief that the Bible was more than church tradition eventually separated the two groups.

Originally then, the title "Reformed" was claimed "by all churches having a common cause against Rome."⁹ These believers saw themselves as returning to the only true and Biblical Christian faith. In this sense, all "evangelical Christians"¹⁰ share a common heritage. At the same time, those affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church "saw the Reformation as rebellion against truth...wherein each individual decided what was and what was not acceptable."¹¹

After nearly five hundred years, few of the wounds inflicted during those turbulent days have healed. Some Protestants do now say that the affairs of the church were not as bad before the Reformation as originally thought, and some Roman Catholics acknowledge the religious depth and significance of Martin Luther. However, most still recognize a deep division between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism over the most basic doctrines of Christianity. "Essentially the differences are now seen to lie in divergent notions of authority and salvation: authority of the *Bible*

⁴ The specific issue most upsetting Luther was the selling of indulgences. Some unorthodox men made lots of money by telling people that they could pay a fee and purchase a friend's way out of purgatory. The little ditty, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" appeared in the advertising copy of Johann Tetzel, one of those who "sold" indulgences.

⁵ The means of debating issues was to write your "theses" and post them on the public "bulletin board" which was the door of the University. Thus, Luther, after writing his now famous "95 Theses Against The Sale Of Indulgences," nailed them to the door at Wittenberg. This was on October 31, 1517 and so began what we now call "The Reformation."

⁶ Thus the name "Protestant" was applied to all who *protested* certain practices in the Roman Catholic church.

⁷ "The term 'Reformation' was employed in the 16th century by the adherents of the movement to express the notion that theirs was an effort at returning the church to its biblical sources. The Roman Catholic Church, in turn, viewed the Reformation as rebellion and revolution. The term 'Protestant' soon [became] the broad name for all followers of the Reformation." *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Reformation."

⁸ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987 ed., s.v. "Reformed."

⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Reformed Churches."

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a listing of denominations which can be considered evangelical (as opposed to Roman Catholic).

¹¹ *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Reformation."

and the Church (Rome) or of the *Bible alone* (Protestant); salvation by *grace and works* (Rome) or by *grace alone* (Protestant)."¹²

Reformed as Distinct from Lutheran

"The Reformation" Develops

Those attempting to reform the Roman Catholic Church did not remain unified. Both theology and politics provided reasons for the continued splitting of the protesters.¹³

The most significant *theological* controversy concerned the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.¹⁴ Though *all* of the Reformers agreed that the Roman position was incorrect, they nevertheless argued over exactly what transpired when Jesus said, "This is my body" (Luke 22.19), and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22.20). Luther believed that Christ was *physically* present in the bread and wine even though the elements were not changed into his body and blood.¹⁵ Another leading Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, maintained that Christ was *spiritually* present, that the Lord's Supper was primarily a memorial meal, and that Jesus was at the right hand of God—*not* physically present in the communion meal.

Meanwhile, John Calvin finished writing *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a work so significant that it would alter the course of the development of western civilization.¹⁶ Additionally, as a leader in Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin was looked upon to reform both society and the church

¹² *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Reformation" (emphasis mine). The recent uproar over *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (a statement of similarities forged between a few leaders in Protestant and Roman Catholic churches) reveals the remaining division. The authors chose not to highlight the doctrinal differences between the two groups' views on salvation. Therefore, many Protestant leaders criticized the work, saying that those differences are too significant to ignore. Kenneth Kantzer, writing for the Senior Editors (*Christianity Today*, July 18, 1994), 17, says, "we dare not gloss over certain essential doctrines that still separate evangelicalism and Catholicism. While this document addresses some of these distinctions, it presents them in ways that do not always accurately reflect Protestant...convictions.... Justification by faith is mentioned as a common commitment as though it had never been a matter of serious disagreement. As a matter of fact, this was the central focus of the doctrinal dispute during the Reformation. Then, as now, traditional Catholics and all evangelicals agree that justification is by grace through faith in Christ. The disagreement lies in whether justification is also by good works in addition to faith."

¹³ For this paper, we will focus on the theological differences. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Reformation" for a good summary of the relationship between politics and the movement.

¹⁴ The Roman church continued to celebrate the Mass and to affirm the physical change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, a process called transubstantiation. Because the Reformer's theology of this sacrament was so different from that of Rome, most did not use the name "Mass." Instead, the sacrament was called "The Lord's Supper," "The Eucharist," or "Communion."

¹⁵ Later theologians applied the term "consubstantiation" to Luther's view. Luther never actually used this word, but preferred to say that believers really and literally partake of the body and blood of Christ, because he is in, with, under, around, and behind the bread and wine.

¹⁶ Justo Gonzalez says of the *Institutes*, "there is no doubt that this was the high point of Protestant systematic theology in the time of the Reformation." *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 64.

according to the teachings of the Bible. Because he thought and wrote so clearly and completely, “Geneva, in size and importance hardly a major town, became the most famous and significant of the towns of the Reformation.”¹⁷

Here also the depth and variety of differences between Luther (on the one hand) and Calvin and Zwingli (on the other) became clear. Although John Calvin and the other Swiss Reformers owed much to Martin Luther,¹⁸ their disagreements led to the splitting of these two groups. Luther’s and Zwingli’s views on the Lord’s Supper have already been mentioned. Calvin believed¹⁹ that Christ was truly present in the Lord’s Supper, but spiritually (by faith) rather than physically. This, however, was not the only issue that ended up separating Lutheran theology from Reformed.²⁰

These two groups also disagreed over the proper way to reform worship and church life. Luther thought it acceptable to keep practices from the Roman Catholic Church as long as the Bible did not specifically condemn these. The Swiss Reformers, however, desired that the Bible be more prescriptive in church affairs: they retained only that which the Scriptures specifically commanded.

Furthermore, the Reformation in Switzerland differed from Lutheranism in the doctrines which were emphasized. The best known of these is the sovereignty or Lordship of God.²¹ Calvin (like many before him) taught that God is Lord in every area of the believer’s life as well as in the unfolding of all of history.²² The Swiss Reformers also stressed teachings such as the purpose of the Old Testament being a guide for how *Christians* are to live,²³ the importance of the mind,²⁴ and the value of a disciplined and simple lifestyle. Some of these differences were obvious in worship;

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. “Reformation.”

¹⁸ Doctrinally, the Swiss churches were similar to Lutheran churches in many ways, For example, both recognized the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures; both taught justification by grace through faith alone and the priesthood of all believers; and both insisted on a personal, responsible decision of faith for salvation.

¹⁹ Although Zwingli never presented his position on the Lord’s Supper in the same way that Calvin did, some have argued that he would have been in agreement with Calvin’s position. Of necessity, Zwingli focused on his understanding of the errors of the Lutheran view.

²⁰ It was almost exclusively *theological differences* which distinguished the followers of Luther (the German Reformer) from Zwingli and Calvin (the Swiss Reformers). Those who agreed with the Biblical interpretations of Luther took up the name “Lutheran.” Those who followed Zwingli and Calvin were known as “Reformed.”

²¹ The conviction that God is sovereign in all affairs of life, including the salvation of sinners, has been held by many theologians throughout the history of the church. It is incorrect to say that Calvin invented these doctrines. However, those who deny the sovereignty of God often use the title “Calvinism” with disdain to refer to this very teaching.

²² This understanding of God’s sovereignty led to the complimentary doctrine that it is only by God’s predestined choosing of sinners, without respect to any merit they may have, that anyone could be saved. Since such an intervention would be (by definition) an act of grace, the basic tenets of Reformed theology are often called “The Doctrines of Grace.”

²³ Calvin considered the Old Testament significant for showing Christian believers what God expects in response to his gracious initiation of salvation. This differed from the Lutheran emphasis on the Old Testament as primarily revealing sin and leading people to Jesus (the only answer for sinfulness).

²⁴ This resulted in the building of many colleges and schools.

Reformed churches clearly emphasized “congregational participation, preaching, hearing the word of God, and simplicity.”²⁵

Putting these thoughts together, it is accurate to say, “Reformed theology was a type of Protestantism—distinct from Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and the theology of the radical²⁶ Reformation.... The central theme of Reformed Theology was the glory of God.”²⁷

Reformed as Distinct from Arminian

Mainline Evangelicalism Today

The Swiss Reformers profoundly influenced many of the countries of Western Europe which would play a significant role in the development of America (primarily England, Scotland, France, and the Netherlands). As a result, the Puritans and Pilgrims arrived with a strongly Calvinistic bent. Even so (and even after Reformed theology had become clearly distinct from Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology), the beliefs and practices of Calvin and his followers were not the only influence on the churches. Another significant disagreement was brewing.

In 1603, Dutch professor²⁸ Jacobus Arminius began teaching ideas contrary to traditional Reformed theology. Two assemblies convened to answer his views. The Dutch Estates General called The Synod of Dort (in 1618) and these delegates refuted each of the theological distinctives of Arminius.²⁹ A second group of pastors and theologians, known as the Westminster Assembly, was convened by the English Parliament in 1643 to decide the true doctrines of the Bible and consult on religious matters. Their work still stands as one of the greatest compilations of theology produced by any Protestant group. Here the doctrines of God’s sovereignty and his grace through all of the process of salvation were most clearly expounded.

²⁵ *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1993 ed., s.v. “Reformation.”

²⁶ Certain groups believed the reforms of Zwingli, Luther and Calvin did not go far enough. Often clumped together as the “Radical Reformation,” they did not agree substantially on theology, although certain elements were held in common. Most distrusted external authority, emphasized pacifism, and rejected infant baptism. (For their views on the last of these Zwingli nicknamed them “Anabaptists,” meaning, “re-baptizers.” When adults who had been baptized as infants joined any of these groups, they had to be re-baptized.)

²⁷ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987 ed., s.v. “Presbyterianism, Reformed.”

²⁸ He taught at the University of Leiden.

²⁹ Arminius summarized his views in five statements, later known as the “Five Points of Arminianism.” Each of his opinions was refuted by a corresponding pronouncement (a “Canon”) from the men at Dort. These five Canons of Dort (known by the acronym “TULIP,” which stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance (or Preservation) of the saints) are usually called “The Five Points of Calvinism,” and are considered by some the essence of the Reformed faith. They do not, however, contain all that it means to be Reformed. As J. R. deWitt notes, “The Canons of Dort continue to be of much value; and I myself find it impossible to conceive that anyone could claim to be Reformed and repudiate them. Beyond all dispute, however, the Reformed faith is much more comprehensive, much more all embracing, than those five points; and one does high injustice to that faith when one restricts its content to a single area of doctrine, essential as that may be” (*What Is The Reformed Faith?* Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 4. See Appendix 2 for more on the Five Points.

Since the theology defined by Dort and Westminster was the same as that of the Swiss Reformers, the name “Reformed” became associated with the followers of these assemblies, just as it had with the followers of Calvin. Additionally, since many of those who agreed with the Westminster group were Presbyterian, the titles “Reformed” and “Presbyterian” are often thought of together.³⁰ Likewise, those who disagreed with Dort, Westminster, and Calvin took titles other than “Reformed” to express their theology. Many Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, and other mainline denominations view the basics of Biblical faith in the same way Jacobus Arminius did. As a result, these denominations are most often associated with Arminianism.

Reformed as a Distinct Theological Position

The PCA Today

So far, we have focused on differences between Reformed and other theological views. Such distinctions are important. Many American Christians profess to disagree with John Calvin or the Westminster Confession, yet do not really know what they believe. Some are Roman Catholic, others Lutheran, still others Arminian. Distinctions help explain the variety of interpretations.

However, the PCA means much more by Reformed than a list of things it is not. The Biblical distinctives of our denomination and theology are essentially positive. Therefore, we now turn our attention to the things we believe. Dr. Dick deWitt defines seven positive commitments of Reformed theology, which I list and summarize here.³¹

First, is the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. “The Reformation rediscovered and accentuated...the authority of the Bible.”³² Those who are Reformed believe that the Bible is the absolute, inerrant, inspired, infallible, and unique Word of God. Moreover, they maintain that the Bible is the only authority for Christian’s faith and life. It truly contains everything necessary for man’s salvation, and it is to be obeyed.

Second, “the Reformed faith is also characterized by the insistence that God is to be known and worshipped as the sovereign God.”³³ God is complete, free, independent, perfect and the Lord of all history and life. He is Creator, Sustainer, and Director.

A *third* “leading feature of the Reformed faith is its constant insistence upon the invincibility of the grace of God.”³⁴ Once God chooses to bless a person in Christ Jesus, even our mistakes, even our sin, even our rebellion cannot repulse God’s great favor.

³⁰ There are, however, Reformed Baptists, Reformed Anglicans, and other Reformed denominations that are not Presbyterian.

³¹ John Richard deWitt, *What Is The Reformed Faith?*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981). deWitt’s summary is accurate and concise, and difficult to improve upon!

³² deWitt, 5.

³³ deWitt, 9.

³⁴ deWitt, 11.

Fourth is the understanding that the Christian faith mandates a Biblical world and life view. The Christian life was never intended to be “understood in terms of asceticism and abandonment of life in this present world.... [Instead,] the Reformed faith, with its grasp of the doctrine of the covenant of grace, has insisted upon a multi-faceted, full-orbed Christian life: a life lived in the world, but at the same time a life that was not oriented to the world and its standards.”³⁵ Every relationship is to be influenced by the Christian faith. Every moment is to be lived in the presence of God.³⁶

Fifth is “a clear understanding of the distinction between, and relationship of, law and gospel.”³⁷ Reformed folk tend to see continuity between the Old and New Testaments.³⁸ The practical effect is that Reformed teaching emphasizes that Christians, “though free from the law as a means of life, continue in a relationship of joyful obedience to the law which God in his free mercy has given.”³⁹

A *sixth* distinctive is a positive view of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the world. Sometimes called the “cultural mandate,” this understanding explains “why we cannot be indifferent to social evils, and to violations of the law of God in society at large; why we must oppose the terrible evil of abortion on demand, the dreadful scourge of moral corruption perceptible on every hand, and also the grinding of the poor and disadvantaged under the heel of the mighty, the oppression of the weak and helpless whatever form that may take.”⁴⁰

Seventh is a distinctive view of preaching. “It is by preaching that God confronts people and draws them to himself, conforming them to the pattern of his Son; indeed, it is by preaching that Jesus Christ addresses himself to the hearts and consciences of men.”⁴¹

³⁵ deWitt, 13.

³⁶ The phrase “in the presence of God” appears often in Reformed writing and is sometimes known by its Latin translation, *coram Deo*.

³⁷ deWitt, 13. See footnote 23 for more on the distinction between this view and the Lutheran view.

³⁸ It is precisely on this point that many see Reformed theology as diametrically opposed to Dispensational teaching. However, Darrell Bock thinks it is unfair to say that “dispensationalism tolerates the absence of law and ethical constraint” or that “dispensationalists are not interested in ministry in the wider culture.” Yet Dispensational theology, by its very definition, denies continuity in God’s plan and would seem inevitably to lead to an absence both of law and of a cultural mandate. Bock admits that current progressive scholars who are “mapping out a dispensational theology for a new era” have much to learn from other traditions, “especially between dispensationalism and covenant theology (a Reformed tradition that stresses the continuity of a covenant of grace through every era).” (*Christianity Today*, September 12, 1994), 26.

³⁹ deWitt, 14. He goes on to say, “Here again is an aspect of the truth which needs to be preached daily and hourly in our present social situation. In a time of rampant ungodliness, when there seems no longer to be any clear grasp of absolute and normative moral principles; when the Lord’s Day is trampled upon and human life is cheap, ...when God is mocked and his precepts defied, and there is very danger on precisely this account of a divine abandonment of our whole social order to the consequences of our greed, lusts, and uncleanness (Ro 1.18 ff.); surely the church of Christ needs to declare with unmistakable conviction and vigor that God will not be mocked and that his holy law cannot be set aside with impunity.”

⁴⁰ deWitt, 16.

⁴¹ deWitt, 18.

Conclusion

We certainly have covered a great deal of ground together. Although the issues are complex, I hope this summary provides you with a better understanding of what it means to be Reformed, which really is to be Biblical in all areas of life. I also hope that you are closer to answering the question, "Do I want to be Reformed?"

One additional idea must be mentioned. To be Reformed always includes the desire for the Scriptures to continue to reform our every thought and action. Only by doing so can we please God and enjoy his favor. *Soli Deo Gloria!* To the glory of God alone!

Appendix 1

Frank Mead⁴² classifies the denominations in America by first distinguishing between “Catholic” and “Evangelical.”

Catholic Group	Evangelical Group
Roman Catholic Church; Orthodox Churches; Episcopal Churches	Fundamentalist; Dispensational; Conservative; Nondenominational; Reformed; Anabaptist; Wesleyan; Holiness; Pentecostal; Charismatic; Black; Progressive; Radical; Mainline

Next Mead notes some of the distinctive marks of the various non-catholic groups:

Evangelical Group	Major Emphasis	Symbols
Fundamentalist	Personal and ecclesiastical separation; biblical literalism	Bob Jones University; American Council of Christian Churches; <i>Sword of the Lord</i>
Dispensational	Dispensational hermeneutics; pretribulation and premillennial beliefs	Dallas Seminary; Moody Bible Institute; <i>Moody Monthly</i> ; Moody Press
Nondenominational	Unity of the Church; restoration of New Testament Christianity	Milligan College
Conservative	Cooperative evangelism; inclusive of all evangelical groups; broad theological base	Trinity and Gordon-Conwell Seminaries; Wheaton College; National Association of Evangelicals; <i>Christianity Today</i> ; Billy Graham; Zondervan Corporation; Evangelical Free Church
Reformed	Calvinism; Puritanism; covenant theology	Calvin College; Westminster, Covenant, and Reformed Seminaries; Francis Schaeffer
Anabaptist	Discipleship; poverty; peace movement; pacifism	Goshen Collent; Reba Place Fellowship; John Howard Yoder
Wesleyan	Arminianism; sanctification	Asbury College and Seminary
Holiness	Second work of grace	Nazarene Church
Pentecostal	Gift of tongues	Church of God; Assemblies of God

⁴² Frank Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 9th ed., (Nashville: Abington Press, 1990), 255, 263. I have reproduced Mead’s chart here with only slight modifications for clarity.

Charismatic	Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Oral Roberts University
Black	Black consciousness	National Association of Black Evangelicals
Progressive	Openness toward critical scholarship and ecumenical relations	Fuller Seminary
Radical	Moral, social, and political consciousness	<i>Sojourners; Wittenberg Door</i>
Mainline	Historic consciousness back to the Reformation	Major denominational movements: Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist

Appendix 2

Pastors David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas of Little Rock, Arkansas, contrast the Five Points of Calvinism with the Five Points of Arminianism in what Lorraine Boettner calls “the clearest and most concise form that we have found any where.”⁴³ As a result, he includes their charts in two of his books. Because Boettner’s comments and their charts are so helpful, they are reproduced here.⁴⁴

The Two Systems Contrasted

We have said that Christianity comes to its fullest expression in the Reformed Faith. The great advantage of the Reformed Faith is that in the framework of the Five Points of Calvinism it sets forth clearly what the Bible teaches concerning the way of salvation. Only when these truths are seen as a unit and in relation to each other can one really understand or appreciate the Christian system in all of its strength and beauty.

The reason that so many Christians have only a weak faith, and that so many churches present only a rather superficial form of Christianity, is that they never really see the system in its logical consistency. It is not enough for the professing Christian to know that God loves him and that his sins have been forgiven. He should know how and why his redemption has been accomplished and how it has been made effective. And that is set forth systematically in the Five Points of Calvinism.

Historically, the Five Points of Calvinism have been held by the Presbyterian and Reformed churches and by many Baptists, while the substance of the Five Points of Arminianism has been held by the Methodist and Lutheran churches and also by many Baptists.

The Five Points of Calvinism may be more easily remembered if they are associated with the word **T U L I P**:

- T — Total Inability
- U — Unconditional Election
- L — Limited Atonement
- I — Irresistible (Efficacious) Grace
- P — Perseverance of the Saints

⁴³ Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Faith*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1983), 24.

⁴⁴ Boettner, 24-28, used by permission. These charts also are included in a newly updated and expanded edition: David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2004), 5-8.

The Five Points of Arminianism	The Five Points of Calvinism
<p>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. 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.</p>	<p>1. Total Inability or Depravity: Because of Adam's fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the Gospel. The sinner is spiritually dead to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free but is in bondage to his sinful nature. He is spiritually dead and estranged from God (Eph 2.1). Therefore man will not—indeed 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 brings a sinner from spiritual death to spiritual life and gives him a new nature. "You must be born again" (Jn 3.17). Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation. "By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves—it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2.8,9).</p>

Arminianism	Calvinism
<p>2. Conditional Election: God's choice of certain individuals for salvation is based on His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the Gospel. Election was determined by or conditioned upon what Man would do. The faith which God foresaw and on 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.</p>	<p>2. Unconditional Election: God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, rested solely on 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.</p>

Arminianism	Calvinism
<p>3. Universal Redemption: 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 will be saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.</p>	<p>3. Limited Atonement: Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was 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.</p>

Arminianism	Calvinism
<p>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 since 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.</p>	<p>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. 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 by man's will in His work of applying salvation, 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.</p>

Arminianism	Calvinism
<p>5. Falling From Grace: Those who believe and are truly saved can, and some do, lose their salvation by failing to maintain their faith and good works. Not all Arminians have been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ and that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.</p>	<p>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.</p>

SUMMARY According to Arminianism	SUMMARY According to Calvinism
Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God, who takes the initiative, and Man, who must respond (man's response being the 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 the decisive role; thus MAN, not God, determines who will be the recipients of salvation.	Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, and the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them willingly to 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 receive the gift of salvation.

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Steele, David N. et. al. 2004. *The Five Points of Calvinism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company. Probably the best place to begin a study of Reformed theology, this is not simply a presentation of doctrines, it is overwhelming proof that the Bible teaches that God is sovereign in the salvation of his children. Hundreds of verses prove that the Bible teaches Calvinism.