



# The Five Points of Calvinism 1

## An Introduction

It will be tragic if those who claim to be *Reformed* do not know of “The Five Points of Calvinism”.

### 1. What we are dealing with.

- One characteristic of the Reformed Faith is belief in the system of salvation called Calvinism, believed to be taught in the Bible.
- The summary of this system has been called “the Five Points of Calvinism”. It is also called “the Doctrines of Grace.” Some argue that it should be “Doctrine” (singular).
- How did this term arise? What are the *Five Points*? Why are they important?

### 2. The rise of Pelagianism.

- Due to the corrupting influence of pagan philosophy, many of the early church fathers of the 3rd and 4th centuries departed from the biblical doctrine of salvation.
  - : Examples, Tertullian of Carthage (d ~220AD), Hilary of Poitiers (d 368 AD), Ambrose of Milan (d 397 AD). (Carthage is now a suburb of Tunis, Tunisia. Poitiers is in France. Milan in Italy.)
- Little is known of Pelagius “Bretto” Morgan (~360-418). He was a British monk who stayed a long while in Rome. He lived an ascetic life and had great power of speech.
- The doctrine peculiar to him became known as Pelagianism.
  - : (i) At the Fall, Adam harmed only himself, not his posterity. No such thing as original sin.
  - : (ii) Man’s will is free. It is up to man to do good or evil.
  - : (iii) God’s grace is given to those who show that they deserve it. The grace of God can be resisted.
  - : (iv) God’s decree of election and reprobation is based on foreknowledge. Christ died for all men. By Christ’s instruction and example, a person can be led to higher perfection.

### 3. Augustine against Pelagianism.

- Augustine was bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa from A. D. 395 to A. D. 430.
  - : He is famous for his books “The Confessions of Saint Augustine” and “The City of God”.
- Augustine opposed the teaching of Pelagius. His teaching became known as Augustinianism.
  - : (i) At the Fall, all mankind sinned in Adam. Human nature became totally corrupt.
  - : (ii) By Adam’s sin, human free will was totally lost. Man can will only evil.
  - : (iii) If man does any good, it is because of God’s work of grace. Since man can do nothing without grace, so he can do nothing against it. It is irresistible.
  - : (iv) From eternity, God made a free and unconditional decree to save some. Christ came into the world and died for the elect only.

- Pelagianism was condemned by the Councils of Carthage (418 AD) and of Ephesus (431 AD). The “ecumenical councils” of those times were gatherings of church leaders to deal with challenges to the teaching of the church.

#### **4. The Reformation.**

- The Reformation began in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Church.
- John Calvin escaped from France to Geneva where he taught powerfully for many years. He wrote his ‘magnum opus’ called “Institutes of the Christian Religion”. The final version appeared in 1559.
- The Reformation spread throughout Europe. Characteristics of the Reformation, not to be confused with “The Five Points of Calvinism”, include: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria.*

#### **5. Calvinism & Arminianism.**

- In 1609, a Dutch seminary professor called James Arminius died.
  - : In 1610, the followers of Arminius drew up five articles of faith in “The Remonstrance” and presented it to the State Church of Holland, demanding that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism be changed.
  - In 1618, a national synod (84 delegates, including 26 from 8 foreign countries) found Arminius’ teaching heretical.
  - : The true scriptural teaching was drawn up which became known as “The Canons of Dort”, published in 1619. It is often summarised as “the Five Points of Calvinism”. These "Five Points" are often rearranged under the acronym "TULIP" for easy remembrance.
- = Since “The Five Points of Calvinism” concern a crucial doctrine of the Bible, we may not treat it as irrelevant to us today.

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