



CALVINISM

A BIBLICAL AND
THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

EDITED BY

DAVID L. ALLEN &
STEVE W. LEMKE

“David Allen and Steve Lemke have assembled a diverse and impressive team of contributors to provide a thoughtful engagement with major aspects of Calvinism. Rejecting Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, hyper-Calvinism, and consistent Calvinism, the various chapters, which include a combination of Arminian, Wesleyan, Calvinian, and Amyraldian perspectives, wade through what have been minefields of controversy for centuries. While not all readers will have their questions answered nor will all Calvinists be persuaded, this significant volume is to be commended for offering substantive responses worthy of serious consideration. The book will be beneficial for people representing various theological traditions, whatever one’s view may be about Calvinism and how it should be understood. It is my prayer that readers will want to echo the irenic spirit represented in the concluding chapter calling for Calvinists and non-Calvinists to join together for the advancement of the gospel.”

—**David S. Dockery**, president, International Alliance for Christian Education, and distinguished professor of theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In this volume, an outstanding team of contributors, representing a range of denominational affiliations and theological perspectives, unite to offer a critique of Calvinism. A remarkably wide range of issues is addressed: from key biblical texts and historical considerations to the traditional five points themselves; from the nature of divine election and human freedom to the character of God and the problem of evil. Throughout the volume, critique is conducted without diatribe, and a spirit of generosity and dialogue—even rapprochement—pervades. Highly recommended!”

—**Paul Rhodes Eddy**, professor of biblical and theological studies, Bethel University

“Over the past two decades, the ‘Young, Restless, and Reformed’ movement has enthusiastically promoted the set of doctrines popularly called ‘Calvinism.’ Large conferences, well-organized networks, an aggressive and very effective online presence, and a massive flood of publications have fueled the movement—and sometimes leave the impression that there is no room for informed and thoughtful criticism or alternative views that remain faithful to biblical teaching. This book offers serious and sustained pushback, and it will be helpful to all (including those who, like me, are not fully persuaded by every argument advanced) who want to think better and more biblically about these important matters.”

—**Thomas H. McCall**, Timothy C. and Julie M. Tennent
Chair of Theology, Asbury Theological Seminary

“For anyone interested in the historic debate between Calvinists and non-Calvinists, I highly recommend this work. I will want to keep a copy handy in the future, so that I can use it for reference and to read again some of the chapters that give me more to think about. The reader will be impressed by at least two things. First, there really is a brand of non-Calvinism that is grounded in faithfulness to the Scriptures and is truly Reformed (in being true to the three solas). Second, there is within the ranks of those who hold this view (whether they self-identify as ‘Arminian’ or not) an interesting variety of viewpoints about some of the details. Thanks to editors Lemke and Allen and to B&H Academic for making this available.”

—**Robert E. Picirilli**, professor emeritus of New Testament and philosophy, Welch College

“A Dutch Reformed student of mine once wisely commented that Reformed theology is a field, not just a flower. Yet it’s the flower—the (in)famous ‘tulip’ of five-point Calvinism—that has blossomed over the past several years among younger generations of free-church evangelicals. This volume raises a variety of serious concerns about the growth of popular Calvinism. Read it carefully and judge for yourself!”

—**Jerome Van Kuiken**, dean and professor of ministry and Christian thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University

“Anyone paying attention knows that Calvinism has been resurgent the past several years. This volume is a multidisciplinary critique of this formidable theological movement, and how it profoundly misrepresents the wonderful, good news of the gospel. Sharply critical, yet irenic, the essays in this volume are a model of forthright, substantive theological debate.”

—**Jerry L. Walls**, professor of philosophy and scholar in residence, Houston Baptist University

CALVINISM

CALVINISM

A BIBLICAL AND
THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

EDITED BY

DAVID L. ALLEN &
STEVE W. LEMKE

B&H
ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique
Copyright © 2022 by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke

Published by B&H Academic
Nashville, Tennessee

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-3989-2

Dewey Decimal Classification: 284.2

Subject Heading: CALVINISM / REFORMATION / CONGREGATIONALISM

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations noted CEB are taken from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

Scripture quotations noted CPDV are taken from the Holy Bible: Catholic Public Domain Version, trans. and ed. Ronald L. Conte Jr., 2009. This version of the Bible has been placed in the public domain by the translator.

Scripture quotations noted ESV are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Scripture quotations noted HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville Tennessee. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted KJV are taken from the King James Version. Public domain.

Scripture quotations noted NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NASB1995 are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NCV are taken from The Holy Bible, New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Scripture quotations noted NET are taken from the New English Translation, NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2017 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations noted NJB are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, published and copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and *Les Editions du Cerf*, and used by permission of the publishers.

Scripture quotations noted NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The web addresses referenced in this book were live and correct at the time of the book's publication but may be subject to change.

Cover design by Mark Karis. Cover pattern by Nadiinko/iStock.

Printed in the United States of America

26 25 24 23 22 VP 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Abbreviations xi

Contributors xv

Introduction by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, editors 1

SECTION ONE

A Biblical and Theological Critique of the Soteriology of Five-Point Calvinism

- 1** A Critique of Total Depravity *by Adam Harwood* 15
- 2** A Critique of Unconditional Election *by Leighton Flowers* 49
- 3** A Critique of Limited Atonement *by David L. Allen* 71
- 4** Is God's Grace Irresistible? A Critique of Irresistible Grace *by Steve Lemke* 129
- 5** A Critique of Perseverance of the Saints *by Ken Keathley* 185

SECTION TWO

Historical Issues with Calvinism

- 6** Calvinism Is Augustinianism *by Kenneth Wilson* 213
- 7** Dissent from Calvinism in the Baptist Tradition
by J. Matthew Pinson 239

- 8** A Wesleyan Critique of Calvinism *by Ben Witherington III* 283

SECTION THREE

**Crucial Theological, Biblical, and
Ecclesiological Issues with Calvinism**

- 9** Romans 9 and Calvinism *by Brian J. Abasciano* 307
- 10** Corporate and Personal Election *by William W. Klein* 337
- 11** The Character of God in Calvinism *by Roger E. Olson* 367
- 12** Determinism and Human Freedom *by John Laing* 389
- 13** Evil and God's Sovereignty *by Bruce A. Little* 433
- 14** The Public Invitation and Altar Call *by Mark Tolbert* 457

Epilogue: Calvinists and Non-Calvinists Together for the Gospel
by Trevin Wax 481

Appendix: Semi-Pelagianism: The Theological Catchall 505

Name Index 509

Subject Index 519

Scripture Index 527

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We did not complete the production of this volume by ourselves; we were aided at every point by a team of helpers. This book originated with former B&H Academic director Jim Baird, who cast the original vision for this project. We received invaluable help through its development from B&H Academic project manager Audrey Greeson and B&H publisher Madison Trammel. Tony Byrne did an incredible job assisting us in editing the articles. Not only did he help edit the articles for style and check documentation; as a Calvinist, he made us aware of possible misrepresentations or overstatements. We are incredibly indebted to our team of well-qualified contributors for their articles, as we remain thankful to those who contributed to *Whosoever Will*. We also express appreciation to our wives for their patience as we worked many months on this project. Most of all, we acknowledge the Lord whom we serve, whom we pray we have represented accurately.

ABBREVIATIONS

Reference Works

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885–87. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
- BDAG* Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, and William Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- BECNT Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
- BFM Baptist Faith and Message
- EDNT* *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93.
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- JETS* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JSNTSup/LNTS *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Supplement Series/
Library of New Testament Studies
- L&N Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.
- LCC Library of Christian Classics. 26 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–60.

LSJ	Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NIDNTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Moisés Silva. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
NPNF	A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 vols. in 2 series. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004. First published 1886–89. NPNF ¹ refers to the first series; NPNF ² refers to the second.
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae Graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne. 161 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857–66.
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76. <i>TDNTa</i> refers to the one-volume abridged edition. Eerdmans, 1985.
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
WSA	The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (series). 44 vols. Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990–.

Bible Translations

CEB	Common English Bible
CPDV	Catholic Public Domain Version
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version (1611) = AV

LEB	Lexham English Bible
LXX	Septuagint
NAB	New American Bible
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible

Works by Augustine of Hippo

<i>Ad Simpl.</i>	<i>Diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum</i>
<i>Adim.</i>	<i>Contra Adimantum</i>
<i>An. et or.</i>	<i>De anima et eius origine</i>
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate dei</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>C. du. ep. Pel.</i>	<i>Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum</i>
<i>C. Jul.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum</i>
<i>C. Jul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra secundam Iuliani responsionem opus imperfectum</i>
<i>C. litt. Petil.</i>	<i>Contra litteras Petiliani</i>
<i>Corrept.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia</i>
<i>Div. quaest.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>
<i>Doctr. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>
<i>Enchir.</i>	<i>Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>ex. Gal.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Galatas expositio</i>
<i>Ex. quaest. prop. Rm.</i>	<i>Expositio quarumdam quaestionum in epistula ad Romanos</i>
<i>Exp. Rom. inch.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio</i>
<i>Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum</i>
<i>Fel.</i>	<i>Contra Felicem Manichaeum</i>
<i>Fort.</i>	<i>Contra Fortunatum Manichaeum</i>
<i>Gen. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>Gen. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi adversus Manichaeos</i>
<i>Grat. Chr.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>

<i>Grat.</i>	<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i>
<i>Immort. an.</i>	<i>De immortalitate animae</i>
<i>Lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio voluntatis</i>
<i>Mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>
<i>Nat. orig.</i>	<i>De natura et origine anima</i>
<i>Nupt. et conc.</i>	<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia ad Valerium comitem</i>
<i>Ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>
<i>Pecc. merit.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum</i>
<i>Persev.</i>	<i>De dono perseverantiae</i>
<i>Praed.</i>	<i>De praedestinatione sanctorum</i>
<i>Quant.</i>	<i>De animae quantitate</i>
<i>Retract.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>
<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>
<i>S. Dom. m.</i>	<i>De sermone Domini in monte secundum Matthaeum</i>
<i>Spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera</i>
<i>Symb. cat.</i>	<i>De symbolo ad catechumenos</i>
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De trinitate</i>
<i>Util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credenda</i>
<i>Ver. rel.</i>	<i>De vera religione</i>

Other Ancient Sources

<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haeresis, Irenaeus</i>
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum, Origen</i>
<i>Comm. Eph.</i>	<i>Commentariorum in Epistulam ad Ephesios, Jerome</i>
<i>Comm. Ev. Joan.</i>	<i>Commentarii in evangelium Iohannis, Origen</i>
<i>Comm. Rom.</i>	<i>Commentarii Romanos, Origen</i>
<i>De bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo, Tertullian</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr</i>
<i>Div.</i>	<i>De Divinatione, Cicero</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>Enneads, Plotinus</i>
<i>Ep. P. Eph.</i>	<i>In Epistulam Pauli ad Ephesios, Victorinus</i>
<i>Exc. Theod.</i>	<i>Excerpta ex Theodoto, Clement</i>
<i>Exp. fid.</i>	<i>Expositio fidei, John of Damascus</i>
<i>Fat.</i>	<i>De Fato, Cicero</i>
<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>Apology 1, Justin Martyr</i>
<i>P. Arch.</i>	<i>Peri Archon, Origen</i>
<i>Philoc.</i>	<i>Philocalia, Origen</i>
<i>Quis div. Salv.</i>	<i>Quis dives salvetur, Clement</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata, Clement</i>

CONTRIBUTORS

Brian Abasciano (PhD, University of Aberdeen) serves as adjunct professor in New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; pastor of Faith Community Church in Hampton, New Hampshire; and founder and president of Society for Evangelical Arminians.

David L. Allen (PhD, University of Texas at Arlington) serves as Distinguished Professor of Preaching, occupying the George W. Truett Chair of Ministry, and director of the Center for Text-Driven Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Leighton Flowers (DMin, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as director of evangelism and apologetics at Baptist General Convention of Texas and professor of theology at Trinity College of the Bible and Theological Seminary.

Adam Harwood (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as professor of theology, occupying the McFarland Chair of Theology, and director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ken Keathley (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as senior professor of theology, occupying the Jesse Hendley Chair of Theology, and director of the L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

William W. Klein (PhD, University of Aberdeen) serves as professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary.

John D. Laing (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as chaplain (colonel), United States Army; senior chaplain, Texas Military Department; former

professor of systematic theology and philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and adjunct teacher at Beeson Divinity School.

Steve Lemke (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as professor of philosophy and ethics, provost emeritus, and vice president for institutional assessment at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Bruce Little (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as professor emeritus of philosophy, and director of the Francis A. Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Roger E. Olson (PhD, Rice University) serves as professor of Christian theology, occupying the Foy Valentine Chair in Christian Ethics at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University.

J. Matthew Pinson (EdD, Vanderbilt University) serves as president and professor of theology at Welch College.

Mark Tolbert (DMin, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as professor of preaching and pastoral ministry, occupying the Caskey Chair of Church Excellence, and director of the Caskey Center for Church Excellence at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Trevin Wax (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as vice president of research and resource development at the North American Mission Board and visiting professor at Wheaton College.

Ken Wilson (DPhil, University of Oxford) serves as professor of systematic theology and church history at Grace School of Theology.

Ben Witherington III (PhD, University of Durham) serves as Jean R. Amos Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary.

INTRODUCTION

— David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, editors —

The Debate over Calvinism

The issue of Calvinism has garnered significant interest in recent years. Collin Hansen tracked the Calvinistic turn of many young ministers in *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists*.¹ National and regional conferences sponsored by Together for the Gospel, 9Marks, and Sovereign Grace Ministries have highlighted and supported Calvinism. The new attention given to Calvinism has led to many young ministers becoming “new Calvinists.”² There are also seasoned scholars who fervently believe in and teach Calvinism. Groups for and against Calvinism have waxed and waned throughout church history, but Calvinism appears to be on the rise at this time. We see many young Calvinists in our seminary classes and in our churches.

¹ Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); see also Hansen's “Young, Restless, and Reformed: Calvinism Is Making a Comeback—and Shaking Up the Church,” *Christianity Today* 50, no. 9 (September 22, 2006).

² Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 3, 194. Sometimes “new Calvinists” have the reputation of being somewhat argumentative, even obnoxious. Michael Horton, himself a Calvinist, described many new Calvinists as being in what he labels “the cage phase”; that is, it might be better if they were left in cages until they mature more as Christians. Horton acknowledged that he became “pretty hard to live with” and “imprisoned by my own pride.”

The debate about Calvinism is not new. Although the issue of human depravity, important to Calvinism, has incurred debate at least since Augustine, the Dutch Reformed Synod of Dort (1618–19) most famously addressed the issue in response to concerns voiced by the Remonstrants, who were themselves Dutch Reformed Calvinists. Theologian Jacob Arminius best articulated their views, although he did not live to attend the Synod of Dort. Other Calvinists strongly disagreed with the Arminian Remonstrants. In preparation for the synod to discuss these issues, some of these Calvinists wrote down their views on human depravity:

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John 15:5, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without [the grace of God], can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements that can be conceived must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ.³

What a strong Calvinist statement of human depravity and our absolute helplessness apart from God to provide for our salvation! It affirms that human beings are so depraved they cannot think, will, or do anything that is truly good. Furthermore, humans cannot save themselves by their own efforts, faith, or free will because they live “in the state of apostasy and sin.” It describes their utter helplessness to think, will, or do good, or to withstand temptations. The only hope for salvation is from God—to be born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit of God. The statement affirms that only God can renew human understanding, thinking, and willing so that humans can do good, for Jesus said that without him humans can do nothing. Indeed, it affirms that any good deed “that can be conceived” must be ascribed only “to the grace of God in Christ.”⁴

³ Schaff, “Five Arminian Articles,” 3:546–47 (Arts. III and V), in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., ed. P. Schaff, rev. D. S. Schaff, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

⁴ Schaff, 3:547.

One might infer that such a strong Calvinist statement voiced the opinions of the Calvinists who formed the majority at the Synod of Dort (the Remonstrants were systematically excluded from the synod, so their views had no real representation). In fact, this statement is a quote from articles 3 and 4 of the issues raised by the Remonstrants. Such a strong affirmation of human depravity and the complete inability of humans to save themselves means the Remonstrants cannot responsibly be called Pelagians or even semi-Pelagians. Nothing could be more foreign to the beliefs of these Arminian Remonstrants than the notion that sinful humans could initiate, much less earn, their own salvation.

Are All Non-Calvinists Accurately Described as Pelagians or Semi-Pelagians?

Just as there are different kinds of Calvinists (and many Calvinists rightly bristle at being called hyper-Calvinists), it is likewise totally inappropriate for theologians to describe these Arminian Remonstrants as Pelagian or semi-Pelagian in doctrine. The Synod of Dort unfortunately mislabeled the Arminian Remonstrants as “entirely Pelagian.”⁵ Some later Arminians do go to that extreme, and they are wrong in doing so. Likewise, some Calvinists became so extreme that they became hyper-Calvinists. But let us abstain from calling them what they are not. The Arminians at Dort were Calvinists—members of Dutch Reformed congregations—who had concerns about the extremes to which some Calvinist theologians had taken Calvinism, at points probably further than Calvin himself. Caricaturing the Remonstrants (or us) as Pelagians or semi-Pelagians is, therefore, historically inaccurate and inappropriate—a *reductio ad Pelagian* caricature.⁶ (See appendix on semi-Pelagianism).

⁵ Rebecca H. Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, Patristic Monograph Series 15 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), ix–x, 1–14. Lest Dr. Weaver’s objectivity on this issue be doubted, she is a professor emerita at Union Presbyterian Seminary, a school in the Calvinist tradition.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., “The Canons of the Synod of Dort, 1618–19,” in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 4 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 2:590 (Rejection of Errors for Heads 3 and 4, sect. 7). For the Latin, see Schaff, “Five Arminian Articles,” 3:570. The Synod further accused the Remonstrants of teaching “that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede—in the order of causality—the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help man’s will to come to conversion before man’s will itself motivates and determines itself. For the early church already condemned this

God's prior initiative in salvation does not have to include Calvinism's paradigm of total inability of the human will, nor does it have to preclude libertarian freedom. Denial of total inability is not denial of total depravity, nor is it semi-Pelagianism. As Arminius rightly made clear in his refutation of the charge of Pelagianism,⁷ the sinfulness of humanity is so complete that only by grace, and grace alone, is human freedom even a possibility.⁸

While both Remonstrants and Dortians agreed that all humans are depraved and totally helpless to save themselves apart from the grace of God, why did the leaders of the Synod of Dort oppose the Remonstrants so bitterly and violently that they persecuted them, forced them out of their churches, arrested and imprisoned them, banished and exiled them, and even beheaded one of them? In what way did the Remonstrants and the Dortian Calvinists significantly differ?

Which Calvinism?

Difficulty in addressing the doctrines of Calvinism accurately stems, in part, from having many Calvinisms rather than one monolithic "Calvinism." Various types of Calvinists differ significantly on a number of issues. For example, saying that any Baptist fully endorses Calvinist or Reformed theology is imprecise. A distinction can be drawn between one who is Calvinist or Reformed (that is, someone who embraces all or most of the doctrines of Calvinism) and one who is Calvinistic (that is, someone who embraces some doctrines of Calvinism). Some Baptists are Calvinistic in their soteriology but not Calvinist in the Reformed sense of the term.

Though imprecise, the famous acronym TULIP has provided the distillation of the doctrinal differences between the two theological positions: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of

doctrine long ago in the Pelagians, on the basis of the words of the apostle: It does not depend on man's willing or running but on God's mercy (Rom. 9:16)." Pelikan and Hotchkiss, "Synod of Dort, 1618–19," 2:591; see also Schaff, "Five Arminian Articles," 3:588. The Remonstrants explicitly denied any human role in initiating salvation, and they affirmed that salvation is initiated by God's grace rather than any kind of human response.

⁷ Pelagianism, as defined by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a "5th-century Christian heresy taught by Pelagius and his followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will." The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica.com, s.v. "Pelagianism," accessed September 28, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pelagianism>.

⁸ W. Stephen Gunter, *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments: An Annotated Translation with Introduction and Theological Commentary* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 189.

the saints.⁹ One reason for the imprecision of the acronym is that some Dortian Calvinists affirmed unlimited atonement.¹⁰

Since the authors in this volume quote from and respond to so many varieties of Calvinism, other Calvinists may object that these arguments do not address the beliefs of their particular stripe of Calvinism. The articles address Calvinism broadly, as opposed to any particular Calvinist thinker, so quoting Calvinists with whom other Calvinists disagree is unavoidable.

Evangelicalism has always had its Calvinist and Arminian wings, mirroring the positions at the Synod of Dort. In Baptist life there were also two theological trajectories—“General Baptists” leaned toward the Remonstrant position, and “Particular Baptists” basically endorsed the Synod’s position (although, being Baptists, neither could fully affirm all the language of the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Confession,¹¹ and as David L. Allen and David Wenkel have demonstrated, some Particular Baptists held to unlimited atonement).¹²

Richard A. Muller, who has indisputable Calvinist credentials, debunked the notion that evangelicals such as Baptists who think of themselves as Calvinists can appropriately claim to be Calvinists simply because they believe in the five points of Calvinist soteriology:

I once met a minister who introduced himself to me as a “five-point Calvinist.” I later learned that, in addition to being a self-confessed five-point Calvinist, he was also an anti-paedobaptist who assumed that the church was

⁹ See the more detailed articulation of the five points and their subpoints in the Canons of Dort in Steve W. Lemke, “A More Detailed Analysis of the Five Points of Calvinism,” in the papers of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, available online at https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/papers-files/Lemke_Five_Points_Methodology.pdf. The TULIP acronym is a twentieth-century development. See Ken Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 78.

¹⁰ See David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 149–62.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the points at which the Particular Baptist Second London Confession diverged from the Westminster Confession, see Steve Lemke, “What Is a Baptist? Nine Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians,” in *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 5.2 (Fall 2008): 10–39, available online at https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/JBTM_5-2_Fall_2008.pdf#page=11.

¹² Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 463–506; David Wenkel, “The Doctrine of the Extent of the Atonement among the Early English Particular Baptists,” *Harvard Theological Review* 112, no. 3 (2019): 358–75.

a voluntary association of adult believers, that the sacraments were not means of grace but were merely “ordinances” of the church, that there was more than one covenant offering salvation in the time between the Fall and the eschaton, and that the church could expect a thousand-year reign on earth after Christ’s Second Coming but before the end of the world. He recognized no creeds or confessions of the church as binding in any way. I also found out that he regularly preached on the “five points” in such a way as to indicate the difficulty in finding assurance of salvation: He often taught his congregation that they had to examine their repentance continually in order to determine whether they had exerted themselves enough in renouncing the world and in “accepting” Christ. This view of Christian life was totally in accord with his conception of the church as a visible, voluntary association of “born again” adults who had “a personal relationship with Jesus.”

In retrospect, I recognize that I should not have been terribly surprised at the doctrinal context or at the practical application of the famous five points by this minister—although at the time I was astonished. After all, here was a person, proud to be a five-point Calvinist, whose doctrines would have been repudiated by Calvin. In fact, his doctrines would have gotten him tossed out of Geneva had he arrived there with his brand of “Calvinism” at any time during the late sixteenth or the seventeenth century. Perhaps, more to the point, his beliefs stood outside of the theological limits presented by the great confessions of the Reformed churches—whether the Second Helvetic Confession of the Swiss Reformed church or the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism of the Dutch Reformed churches or the Westminster standards of the Presbyterian churches. He was, in short, an American evangelical.¹³

Muller disdained Particular Baptists such as John Gill because Gill did not embrace the rest of the Calvinist doctrines.¹⁴ To be fully Calvinistic (Reformed) requires much more than the five points often associated with the Synod of Dort.

¹³ Richard A. Muller, “How Many Points?,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28, no. 2 (November 1993): 425–26. At the time of his writing this article, Muller’s credentials as a Calvinist were evidenced by the fact that he was a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary and wrote this article in *Calvin Theological Journal*.

¹⁴ Muller, 428. “Particular” Baptists were so named because they believed in the “particular” or limited atonement; i.e., they were Calvinistic Baptists.

For Muller, to be truly a Calvinist requires the affirmation of other beliefs such as the baptism of infants, the identification of sacraments as means of grace, and an amillennial eschatology.¹⁵ When these additional Calvinist doctrines “are stripped away or forgotten,” Muller lamented, “the remaining famous five make very little sense.”¹⁶

Presuppositions and Presumptions

Calvinists presume that concepts like total inability, irresistible grace, and regeneration preceding faith are matters of fact. These are all disputed by those of us who are not Calvinists (the latter is disputed by some Calvinists as well).

Presuppositions like “original sin entails original guilt” are taken as fact, and any denial of such is considered evidence of semi-Pelagianism. This was the mistaken approach of Herman Bavinck and appears to be followed by some Calvinists. Not even Reformed theologians are in agreement on whether original sin includes original guilt. Henri Blocher in his book *Original Sin* noted the different views among the Reformed.¹⁷

Calvinists and Arminians err when they claim that theologically one must be either a Calvinist or an Arminian. This approach does not do justice to the varieties of orthodox Christian traditions. Augustinianism is not identical to Calvinism. Nor can Lutheranism be identified as Calvinism. Michael Horton rightly noted that Confessional Lutherans “cannot be pressed into Calvinist-Arminian categories” because they affirm unconditional election and monergism, but deny double predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of believers.¹⁸ Douglas A. Sweeney (dean of Beeson Divinity School) informs us that Lutheranism is . . . Lutherans. They are neither “hesitant Calvinists” nor “two-and-a-half-point Calvinists.”¹⁹ The same is true for Baptists and for all who are non-Calvinists—they are a varied bunch.

¹⁵ Of course, many non-Calvinists also embrace amillennialism.

¹⁶ Muller, “How Many Points?,” 428.

¹⁷ Henri Blocher, *Original Sin*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

¹⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 314n11.

¹⁹ See Douglas Sweeney, “Was Luther a Calvinist?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, July 15, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/was-luther-a-calvinist/>.

Why This Volume?

A decade ago, we coedited and contributed chapters to another volume concerning Calvinism, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical–Theological Critique of Five–Point Calvinism*.²⁰ The book was well received beyond our expectations, selling over fifteen thousand copies, including being published in Spanish.²¹ We even had a response to it published by some Calvinist friends.²² The book went through several printings and sold enough copies that the publisher approached the coauthors about writing another such volume. However, this volume is quite different from *Whosoever Will*. In this new volume the focus is not on Southern Baptists specifically, as was *Whosoever Will*, but on the broader evangelical world. This new work includes authors from the Baptist, Methodist, and Arminian traditions. Of the original articles in *Whosoever Will*, only four have been retained in this volume, and each has been revised and updated.²³ Eleven articles are entirely new contributions.

We as contributors do not agree on all theological beliefs. We come from a number of denominational and theological perspectives. Some are “Calminian” Southern Baptists;²⁴ others hail from various denominations in the Arminian or

²⁰ David L. Allen and Steve Lemke, eds., *Whosoever Will: A Biblical–Theological Critique of Five–Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010). Both of us have addressed Calvinism in other works as well, including David L. Allen, *The Atonement: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Study of the Cross of Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019); Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*; David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood, eds., *Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of “Traditional” Southern Baptist Soteriology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), with the articles “The Sovereignty of God,” and “Five Theological Models Relating Determinism, Divine Sovereignty, and Human Freedom,” by Steve Lemke, 103–117, 169–176, and “The Current SBC Calvinism Debate: Observations, Clarifications, and Suggestions,” and “The Atonement of Christ,” by David L. Allen, 1–8, 55–64; Steve Lemke, “Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, and Sola Scriptura,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Church History: The People, Places, and Events That Shaped Christianity*, ed. E. Hindson and D. Mitchell (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 310–13. We also both served on the Calvinism Advisory Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and have addressed the topic in various church and conference settings and in blog posts.

²¹ David L. Allen and Steve Lemke, eds., *Todo aquel que en Él cree: Una crítica bíblica y teológica a los cinco puntos del calvinismo*, trans. Anabella Vides de Valverde (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

²² Matthew Barrett and Thomas Nettles, eds., *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012).

²³ David L. Allen’s chapter on limited atonement is an entirely new chapter.

²⁴ Tim Stewart, ed., *Mixed Blessings: A Dictionary of Religious Blend Words* (Austin: Laurellia, 2021), s.v. “Calminian.”

Wesleyan tradition. The contributors do not all agree on the security of the believer. The editors—both Southern Baptists—affirm the eternal security of the believer, as do other authors, including Ken Keathley, who wrote the article on perseverance of the saints. However, as Keathley’s article makes clear, we do not agree with some Puritan views that have no real assurance of salvation. For non-Calvinists to disagree over the issue of perseverance of the saints is nothing new. Even Arminius and the early Remonstrants did not overtly affirm that believers could lose their salvation. What they affirmed is that since the Scriptures pointed both ways, they were non-committal on this issue.²⁵

None of the authors in this project is a Pelagian, a semi-Pelagian, or a five-point Calvinist. All these authors join the long history of the church in affirming that Pelagianism is a heresy that overly exaggerates human potential, overly minimizes human sinfulness, and overly minimizes the necessity of salvation solely through the grace of God. All these contributors oppose the “openness of God” perspective that places such a high value on human free will that it affirms God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. What we do hold in common is that we all share concerns about some doctrines of Calvinism, particularly those related to soteriology. Articulating these concerns is what unifies the contributors to this volume. We address these concerns to the evangelical world to affirm our deep belief in the doctrines of God and salvation that we understand Scripture to support. We believe that God so loved the world (by implication every living human being) that he gave his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be sacrificed on the cross for our sin. Therefore, he has decreed that everyone who believes on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will be saved and experience eternal life (John 3:16).

Since reaching the lost is at the heart of God (Matt 18:14; 1 Tim 2:3–4; 2 Pet 3:9), evangelism and missions are at the heart of the concerns of the authors of these chapters, who gladly join hands with all Christians to discover what it means to accomplish the Great Commission in this new millennium. The primary focus of Christians should be to carry out the Great Commission under the lordship of Jesus Christ according to the guidelines found in the inerrant Word of God.

This book includes a variety of perspectives on Calvinism, in four sections that critique Calvinism in four different areas. The contributors address Calvinism from a variety of theological and denominational perspectives.

²⁵ See Art. V in Schaff, “Five Arminian Articles,” 3:547–48.

Section 1 includes articles that address each of the classic five points of Calvinist soteriology in the TULIP. Adam Harwood of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary addresses total depravity; Leighton Flowers of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the *Soteriology 101* podcast addresses unconditional election; David L. Allen from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary critiques limited atonement; Steve Lemke from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary critiques irresistible grace; and Ken Keathley from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary addresses perseverance of the saints.

Section 2 addresses Calvinism from a historical perspective. Ken Wilson of Grace Theological Seminary writes on Augustinianism and Calvinism; J. Matthew Pinson of Welch College surveys various Baptist opponents of Calvinism; and Ben Witherington III of Asbury Theological Seminary provides a Wesleyan critique of Calvinism.

Section 3 addresses a variety of crucial issues from theological, biblical, and ecclesiological perspectives. Brian Abasciano of Faith Community Church in Hampton, New Hampshire, addresses Romans 9 and Calvinism; William Klein from Denver Seminary writes on corporate and personal election; Roger Olson of George W. Truett Theological Seminary addresses the character of God in Calvinism; John Laing, senior chaplain for the Army National Guard and staff member at Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, addresses the interaction of determinism and human freedom; Bruce Little, professor emeritus of philosophy and director of the Francis A. Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, addresses Calvinism and the problem of evil; and Mark Tolbert from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary addresses the public invitation and altar call. The book concludes with an epilogue by Trevin Wax of the North American Mission Board about how Calvinists and non-Calvinists can work together for the gospel of Christ.

Differing Views, Unified Spirit

Addressing a controversial issue such as Calvinism without inflaming emotions is difficult. Therefore, the authors enter into this discussion with some reluctance and yet also with determination. Our reluctance to approach these issues stems from our desire for unity among evangelical Christians. The goal of unity is pleasing to God and presents the most positive witness to those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Arminius himself said, “May God grant that we all may fully agree, in those things which are necessary to His glory, and to the salvation of the church; and that, in

other things, if there can not be harmony of opinions, there may at least be harmony of feelings, and that we may ‘keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’”²⁶

So why does this book deal with such a controversial issue? Because it involves the authors’ deep convictions concerning what they believe the Bible teaches about who God is and how he works in the world. Clearly, others have different convictions, flowing from their biblical interpretations and views of who God is and how he works in the world. These beliefs matter and they deserve to be heard. They lie at the heart of what Christianity is and what the gospel proclaims. The contributors are not “anti-Calvinist” and therefore are interested in dialogue, not diatribe. As Nathan Finn has said, “If we are to move toward a more cooperative future, we must all be committed to defending and commending our particular convictions but not at the expense of either our cooperation with one another or our personal sanctification.”²⁷

This book is offered in that spirit and toward that end. We claim Calvinistic believers as fellow believers and work hand in hand with them as we serve the Lord together. However, we honestly disagree with some points of their theology. Our hope is that disagreement can occur in an irenic Christian spirit, without disagreeableness or harshness. We humbly ask forgiveness when we fail to do so, or when we misunderstand what others have intended. We take our stand on God’s Word and challenge our readers to search the Scriptures to discover what the Bible says about these key issues.

David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke

1 Tim 2:4

²⁶ Jacobus Arminius, “An Examination of the Treatise of William Perkins Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination,” in *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vols., trans. J. Nichols (Buffalo, NY: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), 3:282.

²⁷ Nathan A. Finn, “Southern Baptist Calvinism: Setting the Record Straight,” in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 192.



SECTION
ONE

**A Biblical and Theological
Critique of the Soteriology
of Five-Point Calvinism**

A Critique of Total Depravity

— Adam Harwood —

The Bible uses several words to communicate the concept of sin, such as the Hebrew words *hata* (“to do wrong”), *awon* (“iniquity”), *pasha* (“to rebel”), and the Greek words *adikia* (“unrighteous”), *parabasis* (“transgression”), and *hamartia* (“to miss the mark”). Sin is any deviation from God’s revealed will. People sin by either failing to conform to God’s standards or explicitly opposing them.¹ People sin by their thoughts, attitudes, speech, or actions—either by acting wrongly or failing to act rightly. Sin is against God and nature.² Sin is a reminder that the world is not the way it should be.³

God’s good creation has been defiled by sin. Presently, neither this world nor humans are the way God created them in the beginning. Since the first couple, Adam

¹ David J. Sigrist, “Sin,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

² Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

³ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

and Eve, chose to disobey their Creator (Genesis 3), humans have been broken and live in a fallen world. The effects of their rebellion against God can be traced through the book of Genesis in the escalation of violence and death, and the consequences of sin can be seen today. Why does a hurricane drown the coast and cancer ravage a body? The root cause is that we live in a fallen world. Why do some people make sinful choices that result in the abuse or murder of innocent victims? Humans are broken and sinful, which does not excuse sinful deeds. People should be held accountable for their actions. The point is, the Bible accounts for the situation. The first couple's disobedience in the garden introduced these occasions of moral evil (events caused by a person's will) and natural evil (events not caused by a person's will, such as weather and illness) that damage God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31).⁴ Thankfully, God did not leave people in this hopeless and helpless condition. Instead, he came to the rescue by sending his Son to earth to live a perfect life and then die as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29). God will redeem and restore his creation in Christ. At that time, the people of God will live with him in a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no sin, death, or dying (Revelation 21–22). However, until God's plan of restoration and salvation is complete at the future return of Christ, we live in bodies and in a creation that longs for restoration (Romans 8). We inhabit a body of death (Rom 7:24) in a beautiful-but-broken world. Three things are true about sin and sinners.

First, *sin is universal*. Every person has been impacted by sin. This impact is unavoidable. Even Jesus, who was sinless and committed no sin (Heb 4:15; 9:14; 1 Pet 2:22), was impacted by sin. Jesus was crucified by sinful people (Acts 2:23), took on the sin of the world (John 1:29), and became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). The impact of sin is indeed universal. In Romans 1–2, Paul indicted every person as an idolater and lawbreaker, both Jew and non-Jew. "All have sinned," he wrote, "and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Second, sin is not *a* human problem; sin is *the* human problem. It was the sin of the first couple that ruptured their relationship with their Creator and introduced shame, alienation, and death into the created order. Human sin prompted the sacrificial system, which resulted in God's judgment on sin being deferred (Rom 3:25–26) until its culmination in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross—which Paul calls a demonstration of God's love (Rom 5:8). Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NIV.

give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus came to give his life for sinners. Sin is *the* human problem, and God solved that problem at the cross of Christ.

Third, *sinners cannot save themselves*. Paul reminds believers they are saved by grace through faith, “and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). Salvation is “not by works, so that no one can boast” (v. 9). Any boasting about salvation will be in God because only God saves sinners. Paul clarified to Titus that God saves people because of his kindness, love, and mercy—not because of their righteous actions (Titus 3:4–5).

God created a good world; humans fell, and all of creation and every person is wounded by sin, for which God provides the only remedy in the cross and resurrection of Christ. Christians are broadly unified on these statements about the problem of and solution for sin.

However, rather than maintain this broad and unified understanding of sin, theologians have attempted to explain further the details of the doctrine of sin. Multiple views developed and Christians divided as they attempted to answer these precise doctrinal questions. One of those topics over which Christians differ concerns the doctrine of *original sin*, which refers to the nature and effects of the first couple’s sin on all people. Christians agree that sin is the universal human problem, and sinners cannot save themselves; however, Christians differ over the issues of human guilt and salvation. This chapter addresses these areas of difference:

1. What do people inherit from Adam’s sin in the garden?
2. When can sinners repent of their sin and confess Jesus as Lord to be saved?

What Do People Inherit from Adam’s Sin in the Garden?

Two Christian Views of Original Sin

The first question to be addressed in this chapter is what do people inherit because of Adam’s sin in the garden? Though the views can be categorized further and nuanced more precisely, Christians affirm two main positions on original sin. *Inherited guilt* is the view that all people inherit from Adam sinful inclinations, mortality, and the guilt of Adam’s sin. *Inherited consequences* is the view that all people inherit from Adam sinful inclinations and mortality, not the guilt of his sin. Theologians who write about original sin assign various terms, but they generally distinguish between those two main positions.

In *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, Pier Franco Beatrice distinguished between what Joseph Turmel originally called hereditary sin and hereditary decline.⁵ *Hereditary sin* is the view that all people suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, primarily physical death, and his descendants are guilty of sin transmitted from him. *Hereditary decline* is the view that all people suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, primarily physical death, but this view denies that sin is passed to Adam's descendants. Hereditary sin corresponds to inherited guilt, and hereditary decline corresponds to inherited consequences.

Donald Macleod, in "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," detailed the debates among Reformed theologians about what was received from Adam. Macleod referred to the two views as immediate imputation and mediate imputation. *Immediate imputation* is the view that Adam's descendants receive an immediate imputation of both corruption and guilt due to Adam's sin. *Mediate imputation* is the view that Adam's descendants inherit corruption from him, but guilt is mediated through their own sinful acts.⁶ Immediate imputation corresponds to inherited guilt, and mediate imputation corresponds to inherited consequences.

Thomas H. McCall provided a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the historic Christian theories of original sin. He detailed six major options, definitions, and representatives:

1. *Symbolic and existential interpretations*—deny the existence or importance of Adam and Eve (F. R. Tennant, Paul Tillich)
2. *Corruption-only doctrines*—corruption without corresponding guilt due to Adam's sin (Christian theology before Augustine, the Orthodox Church, Ulrich Zwingli, Richard Swinburne, Stanley Grenz)
3. *Corruption and guilt: federalism*—all people are guilty of Adam's sin because he represented humanity in the garden (Francis Turretin)
4. *Corruption and guilt: realism*—all people are guilty of Adam's sin because they were present with him in the garden (Augustine, Jonathan Edwards)

⁵ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans. Adam Kamesar, AAR Religion in Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–8.

⁶ Donald Macleod, "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Hans Maudeme and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 139–44.

5. *Corruption and guilt: mediate views*—all people are guilty due to the corruption from original sin, not for the sins of Adam and Eve (Anselm, John Calvin, Henri Blocher)
6. *Conditional imputation of guilt*—all people ratify the guilt of Adam when they knowingly commit their first act of sin (Millard Erickson)⁷

The first view is not considered in the present study because it denies the historicity of the first couple and their sin in the garden. View 2 corresponds to inherited consequences, and views 3–6 correspond to inherited guilt.

Beatrice (who wrote from Italy), Macleod (from Scotland), and McCall (from the United States) used different terms to identify the same theological distinctions. This chart illustrates the relationship between their terms and the terms used in this chapter.

Terms used in this chapter	<i>Inherited guilt</i> —all people inherit a fallen world, sinful inclinations, mortality, and the guilt of Adam’s sin	<i>Inherited consequences</i> —all people inherit a fallen world, sinful inclinations, and mortality
Pier Franco Beatrice, <i>The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources</i>	<i>Hereditary sin</i> —all people suffer the effects of Adam’s sinful act, and his sin is transmitted to his descendants, resulting in their guilt	<i>Hereditary decline</i> —all humanity suffers the consequences of Adam’s sin, primarily physical death, with no transmission of sin and guilt
Donald Macleod, “Original Sin in Reformed Theology”	<i>Immediate imputation</i> —all people receive an immediate imputation of Adam’s guilt	<i>Mediate imputation</i> —all people inherit corruption from Adam, but guilt is mediated through their own sinful acts
Thomas H. McCall, <i>Against God and Nature</i>	<i>Corruption and guilt</i> (federalism, realism, and mediate views); <i>Conditional imputation of guilt</i>	<i>Corruption-only doctrines</i>

⁷ McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 149–76.

Both perspectives acknowledge that sin has impacted God’s creation, including all of Adam’s descendants. Both views also acknowledge all people will inherit corruption (which some refer to as a sinful nature), and both views depend on the person and work of Christ alone for salvation. The inherited guilt view, however, adds that all people are guilty of Adam’s sin. In this chapter, I affirm both views as orthodox but argue for the inherited-consequences view.

Early Church Fathers Who Affirmed Inherited Consequences

Historical theologians generally agree that the concept of original sin as people inheriting the guilt of Adam’s sin was virtually unknown in the entire Christian tradition until the later writings of Augustine.⁸ Instead, the early church—in both the East and the West—affirmed views consistent with inherited consequences.⁹ Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Mark the Hermit, Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus all rejected inherited guilt.¹⁰ For these and other pastor-theologians, Adam’s sin did not result in total human depravity but a weakened will, physical death, and other non-condemnatory results consistent with inherited consequences. J. N. D. Kelly explained, “There is hardly a hint in the Greek fathers that mankind as a whole shares in Adam’s guilt.” The same was true of the Latin fathers. Though they viewed sin as a “corrupting force,” the guilt of Adam’s sin “attaches to Adam himself, not to us.”¹¹ Many in the early church rejected Augustine’s later views of predestination and the loss of human free will, though they were labeled (many inappropriately) as Pelagians or semi-Pelagians. Most who opposed Augustine were orthodox theologically, affirm-

⁸ “It is virtually an axiom of historical theology that the doctrine of original sin, as we recognize it today, cannot be traced back beyond Augustine.” Gerald Bray, “Original Sin in Patristic Thought,” *Churchman* 108, no. 1 (1994): 37.

⁹ McCall identified “the affirmation of *corruption* in original sin *without a corresponding affirmation of guilt* [McCall’s italics]” as “the view of early (pre-Augustinian) Christian theology.” McCall, *Against God and Nature*, 156.

¹⁰ Beatrice, *Transmission of Sin*, 259. See pp. 172–256 for his support for this claim from the primary sources. See also Kurt Jaros, “The Relationship of the So-Called Semi-Pelagians and Eastern Greek Theology on the Doctrine of Original Sin: An Historical-Systematic Analysis and Its Relevance for 21st Century Protestantism” (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2020), for primary and secondary sources on the views of Clement of Alexandria (pp. 120–22), Athanasius (pp. 126–30), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (pp. 141–44).

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 350, 354.