

# **A discussion on 'Arminianism versus Calvinism' by Paul Wilson, the import of preaching and the relevance of the five points of Calvinism**

(with contributions by the late James Alan Smart, 1932-2011)

## **A contribution by Gerald E. Lincoln:**

This is a short article by Thomas Ice on the Calvinism-Dispensationalism nexus. I had written to Paul Scanzillo earlier that Pink cannot be used to represent anyone but Pink. He was such a cantankerous individual that he could not find more than a few people to fellowship at any one time. The Plymouth Brethren movement came out of Calvinist backgrounds. JND was very much a 5 point Calvinist, i.e. TULIP.

Dallas Theological Seminary was founded as a Presbyterian school. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson was asked to leave as a professor because of his Calvinist views in the area of salvation, I believe in the 1970's. This reflected a shift to a 4 point Calvinist view in salvation in much of fundamentalism and along with it PB's in the 20th century. S. Lewis Johnson attended an Open Brethren assembly in Dallas when I had a class from him in about 1984.

It is a historical fact that dispensationalism was popularized in America by Presbyterians who were influenced by JND and other PB teachers. R. Todd Mangum in his dissertation traced the history of the separation of "calvinists" and dispensationalists. He documents it in the dissertation and I have talked to him that the Scofield Reference Bible had a major role in the "falling out". Scofield had been a Presbyterian, but his notes are more Arminian and one note especially in John was used to call him a heretic. (The falling out between dispensationalism and covenant theology: a historical and theological analysis of controversies between dispensationalists and covenant theologians from 1936 to 1944 / by R. Todd Mangum, 2001.)

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## **First contribution by Daniel Bubenzer:**

May I just share privately some thoughts concerning Paul Wilson's article (I do not know the brother) and Calvinism:

- doctrinally bro. Wilson's article is helpful.
- the tone is at times questionable.

- it gives the impression that Pink is a "typical" Calvinist, while it seems to me that he is rather on the "hyper" side. Those amongst us who love MacArthur and Piper (I do not) will probably feel that injustice is being done to the Calvinists.
- it gives the impression that "the early brethren" were closer to Arminianism than Calvinism, which is far from being so...they were much closer to Calvinism (and I am personally concerned because I see Arminianism creeping into our midst, while at the same time it seems that now Calvinism is starting to creep in, maybe as a counter-reaction?!).

I attach an incomplete research of quotes of brethren that my brother Philip and I put together to see for ourselves where the "early brethren" stood. Would you agree with my observations?

## First contribution by Hugo Bouter:

Many thanks for your reaction, Daniel, and the anthology composed by your brother Philip and yourself. I noticed that Paul Wilson is extensively quoted in your 'Sammlung' (sections 4.4 and 5.4). I understand that he was associated with the TW Brethren. As a matter of fact I borrowed the article from [www.biblecentre.org](http://www.biblecentre.org) long ago, and in the bibliography you will find several references to other Brethren writings as well. I still feel that it is helpful, and at least a good critique of Arthur Pink's book. But opinions on Pink differ, as you can see from another response that I got from USA. I will forward this shortly, and copy it also to my brother Alfred in Canada, as he may have more to say on the subject.

It is perfectly true that our own position is much closer to the Calvinistic view than to the Arminian view. Early Brethren were certainly no free-will thinkers. But in my opinion bro. Wilson refutes both Arminianism and Calvinism. It remains very difficult, however, (not to say, impossible) to mould the truth of God within any system of human thinking. Both systems have their own weaknesses, so I would like to make the following remarks:

- The mutual relations between man's will and his responsibility on the one hand, and God's sovereignty on the other escape human reasoning. Compare Luke 7:30, where it is said that the Pharisees rejected the counsel or purpose of God for themselves, and also Acts 2:23 (Christ was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, but crucified and slain by the wicked hands of men).
- Man's will, is it free or in bondage? This is a difficult philosophical problem. Look at it from different angles, and both statements can be said to be (partially) true. Salvation is free for whoever wills it (Rev. 22:17), but it is *God* who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).
- We agree with unconditional election, but not with reprobation from eternity. The idea of a 'double predestination' is not biblical.
- We should hold to a general atonement (in the sense that God has been fully satisfied and glorified by Christ's work on the cross), but to a limited substitution and the redemption of God's people.
- The truth of the eternal security of true believers cannot lift the seriousness of all the warnings, the if's of Scripture. But we should rather speak about God's faithfulness to keep us than our own perseverance in the faith.

You are quite right to conclude that both systems of thinking pose threats to the life of faith. When we stay close to the Lord and adhere to the Scriptures, we have the Lord's promise that we will be kept from stumbling. Blessings from above in your work for the Lord.

PS. I have two recent critical works on Calvinism in my library: (1) "The other side of Calvinism", by Laurence M. Vance, Ph. D. (revised edition), published by Vance Publications, Pensacola, Florida. (2) "What love is this? Calvinism's misrepresentation of God", by Dave Hunt, published by Loyal Publishing ([www.loyalpublishing.com](http://www.loyalpublishing.com)).

## **Second contribution by Daniel Bubenzer:**

Thank you for your comments and the interesting article of bro. Ice. As I think the subject is best discussed orally, I would like to keep my reply as short as possible:

The verse in Luke 7:30 I find indeed not easy to explain, in Revelation 22:17 I do not see anybody take the water of life in which the Holy Spirit has not been “doing a work”, or that the Father has not started drawing (John 6:44) – but I would also be very careful to connect the two verses, as Revelation 22 has the responsibility of man in view while John 6 looks at the sovereignty of God. Those two parallels will meet in eternity.

Bro. Ice opened my eyes to the fact that Calvinists don't necessarily need to be “covenanters”. This is something John MacArthur as a Calvinist also insists on, even stating that every true Calvinist should hold to pre-millennialism (and dispensationalism?). To call the early brethren “Calvinists” might be going a little too far, as they definitely differed on “limited atonement”. As you stated, Calvinists do not understand the difference between atonement and substitution, which is most important.

When we speak about Calvinists, we would have to define who we mean. It appears to me (from other discussions with brethren in Europe) that Calvinists in Holland are different from those in America. In the US I do not see them necessarily hold the false doctrine of double-predestination. I am impressed by the great move of the Holy Spirit under predominant Calvinistic Gospel preaching in the 18th and 19th century and feel that today much is lacking in the preaching of the Gospel.

Free-will: If this is the case that all we have to reach in the Gospel is to “turn around” the will of an unbeliever, then all helpful means will be welcome (logic, “proofs”, music that helps the emotions, etc.). I am convinced (as I know you are) that we cannot manipulate the work of God. I personally would firmly stick to the teaching of the early brethren (which I believe to be biblical) concerning that question. Views on this question have far-reaching consequences in the practice of our Gospel meetings.

Although I respect Dave Hunt, I believe he should not have written his book against Calvinism. He calls himself a “0-point Calvinist” and to me has misrepresented Calvinism in the way he presents it to make some points. In his oral preaching about the subject he applies Isaiah 53:6 to “all men”, which to me is doctrinally wrong and would eventually lead to Allversoehnung. But if I am wrong in my understanding, I would be ready to learn. The other book you mentioned, I do not know.

Calvinist James M. Boice suggests instead of TULIP the following (to make it more clear): Radical Depravity, Unconditional Election, Particular Redemption, Efficacious Grace and Persevering Grace. In content he seems, however, not to differ from the traditional TULIP (I have read only a few pages of his book, because a young man in the US had problems with the subject and liked the book. I found here also that “limited atonement” is a problem). Perseverance of the saints: Brian Reynolds in the Lord is Near suggested “Perseverance of the High Priest”, which I like.

Sometimes I am not sure why this subject is always so important to me. Somehow I feel that much depends on it, and that it is coming into our midst. I might be wrong. And then there have always been brethren leaning more to the one or other side. If you or bro. Alfred have anything to correct or add, I am open. If it is not worthwhile to put more time into that question at this moment, let us redeem the time. I am not sure if this mail is useful in its entire content, but had those points on my heart. Thanks again for your time.

## **First contribution by Alan Smart**

You referred Paul Scanzillo to the article by brother Wilson on the matter of Calvinism. It is a very good article. However, it does not really address the difficulty many dear saints have over foreknowledge and predestination. If God will only save those He has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, the rest are obviously not intended by God to be saved by Him. We do not know how God has decided whom He will save, but if we fully believe in predestination and foreknowledge we must accept that there are some whom God does not intend to save. The word “desires” in 1 Timothy 2:4 (JND translation) does not describe

the absolute will of God. I feel that the "brethren" writers have not faced up to this issue.

I know brethren take Scriptures such as 1 Peter 2:8 to mean that it is the disobedient person's destiny which was appointed, not the person himself. This of course ducks the issue. God is still choosing that some will become disobedient. All the great English Gospel preachers were thorough Calvinists – Whitefield, Toplady, Spurgeon – yet they preached as if all men could be saved. I have followed their example for 62 years. CHM said that every Gospel preacher should believe in Calvinism, but should not preach it. Hope you don't mind me emailing you.

## **A contribution by Alfred Bouter:**

Thanks for the exchange with all the attachments and comments; you did a lot of work, Daniel. I had written a personal note to Paul Scanzillo, but now I add a few comments to you in view of the further exchanges that have taken place.

I think I am much closer to bro. Smart than to Gerald Lincoln or even Thomas Ice, although he is quite sound. It would be wrong to qualify JND as a Calvinist. We should not underestimate the leaven that existed in Augustine's theology and that had a great influence on Calvin. It is interesting that Guillaume Farel, although appreciating Calvin very much, distanced himself gradually from the extreme Calvinistic views and focused on preaching the Gospel.

We can learn a lot from what JND did; he identified with what was of God in Calvin, as we still can do, but not with its leaven. It reminds me of what God told Jeremiah, 15:19. The important point is to realize that we need the zeal as if everything depends on man, and at the same time the dependence on God who only can do the work that is needed.

My and Hugo's father used to refer to Acts 13:48b (God's side) and 14:1 (man's side) to help seeing these two points. We cannot bring them together (only God can), but need to respect them. We need to distinguish them, but not separate them, excluding or overemphasizing one against the other. May He help us.

## **Third contribution by Daniel Bubenzer:**

I find your comment really helpful and like the verses in Acts to show the two sides. Thank you very much. I quite liked bro. Alan's comment about how to preach the Gospel, but was surprised about his statements about predestination: "We do not know how God has decided whom He will save, but if we fully believe in predestination and foreknowledge we must accept that there are some whom God does not intend to save." And: "God is still choosing that some will become disobedient." Maybe I misunderstood him? Or was he just showing the problem of the conclusions we would have to draw. I don't have an answer to explain those difficulties and especially 1 Peter 2:8 remains a question mark to me. If you have a thought on this I would be thankful.

## **Second contribution by Hugo Bouter:**

Thank you all very much for your various contributions to this subject, I found them helpful and constructive. Some further remarks. As to Isaiah 53:6, the first 'all' could refer to all men, but the second 'us all' clearly refers to believers only. And concerning 1 Peter 2:7,8, this refers to people who are already disobedient to the Word. We cannot blame God for their sin. By the way, Allversoehnung is universalism in English.

I feel that the Gospel should be preached (1) with an appeal to man's will (and to his heart and conscience

etc.), and that (2) the love of God in Christ should be presented as real and well-meaning to all men. That is perhaps the point where Calvinism has failed most.

## **Fourth contribution by Daniel Bubenzer:**

Thank you for your respective helpful messages. On the mission field I have been able to witness various "conversions". With tears, without tears, different ages and backgrounds, and I have heard prayers of surrender (some excellently formulated, some very "poor"). Then I have observed the following development. Some showed fruit and were obviously real, but quite some also did not show fruit according to their profession (Matt. 13). I realized that sometimes much emphasis is put on the "sinner's prayer". But that doesn't save. We do not see in Scripture that anyone was asked to pray in order to be saved. In Numbers 21 they were not asked to pray to Moses or the serpent, but to look expectantly (to believe that looking to the serpent was the only means of salvation, John 3:14-16).

Of course a repentant sinner *will* confess his sins in prayer, and if he doesn't, it evidences that there is no work of God. But if he is pushed to do it, it does not mean that there is a work of God either. The tragic thing is that in the latter case he usually is then declared to be saved and never to be lost again, while yet in his sins and on his way to hell. Millions have been given false security through modern Gospel campaigns (but I trust the Lord that He will yet show it to them). And I am afraid that we are also too ready in our midst, not to carefully discern if there is a work of God. The evangelist will always be tempted as he would love to be able to rejoice over fruit. But E. Dennett writes: "The Lord always sought to deepen exercises of soul, as He did in the case of the Syrophenician woman, refusing to grant her request till she was in the state to receive it. We seek to shorten them, as, for example, when we press souls to an immediate decision for Christ, without considering whether they have been brought to that point by the work of the Holy Ghost." (end of quote) That is why I do not focus on the will of man when I preach, but more on the heart and conscience. Yet, I have felt free to close a Gospel Meeting with the words of Deuteronomy 30:19, as it is the Word which God can use to save a soul.

I appreciate much your point about the love of God to the world (*not* just the "world of the elect", but "all men"). What wonderful *love*, and it must be preached (although maybe preferably *after* someone has understood his sinful state?). I will also be interested in what bro. Alan Smart will have to say.

## **Third contribution by Hugo Bouter:**

Good to hear from you, bro. Alan. Paul's question really sparked off an interesting exchange of thoughts between a number of brethren, as you can see from this compilation. In a second mail to you I will include the other documents referred to in our discussion. Great that you are still preaching the Gospel at your age! I liked your quotation from CHM about Calvinism. And of course, we should not be preaching Calvinism (or any other system) but only Christ crucified.

## **Second contribution by Alan Smart:**

I am at present recovering from a six month spell of chemotherapy, so am not much up to dilating at great length on any deep subjects at the moment. However, I would like to say first of all that I do not know what Calvin was like in his day nor what Calvinists are like in Holland or the USA, but I do know about his adherents to-day in Scotland, the Free Church and the Free Presbyterians. I have been in touch with them over the past year and it is evident to me that there is no way we can compare early "brethren" with Calvin. The Calvinists I meet to-day do not believe in salvation the way we do. They are not evangelical. I have been in touch with the editor of their magazine, the moderator of their general assembly and the son of the

principal of the Free Church College who is a journalist and has written a book to prove that they are not evangelicals in any sense of the word. At a recent open air Gospel meeting one of these Free Church people listened to what we preached, then said we cannot be sure of being in heaven. He did not know whether he would be there or not.

I therefore counsel all "brethren" to ignore Calvinism and get on with the job of preaching the Gospel. We can have at the back of our minds the scriptural teaching "brethren" have given on predestination and foreknowledge, verses such as Romans 8:29,30; Ephesians 1:5,11 etc. We do not understand how or whom God has foreknown. As I said in my previous email, it is evident that if some finish up in hell this must be in accordance with the purpose of God. As regards 1 Peter 2:8, if these people have already become disobedient this must be in the positive will (Gr. *boulema*) of God. God is all-powerful and knowing. He is not taken by surprise by these people. Obviously if there is a believer who is troubled by it, we can seek graciously to help him.

We must put these truths of scripture out of our minds or they impair our preaching. I know there was tendency among the Lowe-Kelly brethren right up to the 1970's to say that God works and we must exert effort in the Gospel preaching. I was brought up in the Glanton meetings where this view was not held. The brethren there felt that while it is God who works, we do not know how He works and it is necessary in Gospel preaching to bring home to man in no unmistakable terms his sinfulness and that his only hope is in trusting Christ. We know that he will not trust Christ on his own initiative, but the Spirit uses many means of bringing man to his confession. Great evangelists such as Charles Stanley, W.T.P. Wolston, JTM, AJP, FBH had found in their evangelical labours that it was often necessary to awaken souls by words from the Holy Spirit. They were all sound predestination believers. I sat in Bible readings with AJP and FBH and heard them speak on it. They said we should advertise meetings, give out printed invitations, etc. In fact Dr. Wolston took over a theatre beside the university in Edinburgh for his meetings. He was opposed by many brethren, the same ones who opposed the Westcott brothers going to the former Belgian Congo in 1898.

The matter of God's sovereign choice has always been summed up for me in the two scriptures which speak of the Lord giving Himself as a ransom:

Matthew 20:28 Gr. 'anti' = instead of *many*; 1 Timothy 2:6 Gr. 'hyper' + the genitive case = for the sake of *all*. Our Lord's work is sufficient to save all mankind, *propitiation*. But He is actually the ransom for those who have truly believed in Him. Also Romans 3:22 – righteousness of God *unto* all, but only *upon* all those who believe. Let us forget about Calvinism, get hold of the truth of predestination and get on with preaching the Gospel and building up the assembly.

## **Fourth contribution by Hugo Bouter:**

Thank you for your interesting reply, Alan, which I shared with Daniel and Alfred. It is sad to hear about the spirit of unbelief in these people, and difficult to help them. I can agree with what you are saying, but we should be careful not to make God in any way the Author of sin. The disobedience of unbelievers is entirely *their* fault, and God is not to be blamed. This is a problem to our finite minds, but as Daniel has said earlier: the two lines will meet in eternity. And God will be glorified in the eyes of all His creatures. I hope the Lord will grant you a full recovery from your illness.

## **Third contribution by Alan Smart:**

Thanks for your encouraging message. I agree that God is not the Author of sin. However, if I understand the foreknowledge of God aright, He will know that those who turn out to be disobedient are going to do so. I meant to add that I have found 29 references in the New Testament to the fact that God has predetermined some to be saved but not all. Sixteen of these references are from the lips of our Lord Himself as given in John's Gospel, for example in John 17:9 – "those whom Thou hast given me". When discussing this matter with dear brother Daniel Paterson he said that John 6:37b was the means of his conversion. He said that

some years later he came into the good of the first half of the verse: "all that the Father gives me shall come to me". He said that he had thought that it was his own work that had made him trust the Lord Jesus as his Saviour. He then came to see that it was the work of the Father which had brought him to Christ.

I am interested to see that the Daniel is Daniel Bubenzer. You will know, Daniel, that your brother Johannes is now with us at Haddington. I wrote about the energy with which the preachers such as JTM, AJP, FBH preached the Gospel. When I took Johannes down to the open air preaching in the centre of Edinburgh he was amazed at the fervour with which the brethren preached the Gospel there. May the Lord bless you all in your labours for Him.

### Boeken om de Bijbel 2011

