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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

The Synod of Dort

Does Calvinism have five points? Is that a silly question? No! It is a good question. And the answer may surprise. The answer is yes and no!

Yes, Calvinism has five points—obviously. We have books on the five points. Tabletalk has had articles on the five points. We even talk about TULIP as a way of remembering the five points: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

And yet we can say, “No, Calvinism does not have five points.” The five points are not a summary of Calvinism. If you want a summary of Calvinism, you must turn to one of its great confessional documents such as the Belgic Confession or the Westminster Confession of Faith. Those confessions cover many more subjects than those covered in the five points. Calvinism has many more points than five.

So, where did the “five points of Calvinism” come from? It is particularly appropriate to ask that question now, because 2018–19 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the five points of Calvinism. (If you are missing the celebrations of the five-hundredth anniversary of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, this will give you something to go on celebrating.) The five points actually originate as a Calvinist response to the Arminians in the Netherlands after the death of Jacobus Arminius, a response that culminated in the Synod of Dort (1618–19).

The Reformed Church in the Netherlands had emerged in the midst of great struggles. The first preachers of Calvinism there were French speaking, coming from Geneva in Calvin’s time and from France. Initially, the early Reformed churches there experienced significant persecution. Because of this persecution as well as other tyrannical actions, a revolt began against King Philip of Spain, who also ruled over the Netherlands. Both the Dutch state and the Dutch Reformed church were born at about the same time in the midst of great conflict. The state of the Low Countries was ultimately split in two, roughly corresponding to modern Belgium in the south (remaining Roman Catholic) and the Netherlands in the north (predominately Reformed). That northern country became a republic known as the United Provinces.

The Reformed church attracted a strong popular following, but not a majority of the population. Its dominant position came in part from state support in the United Provinces, which favored the Reformed church and outlawed the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformed church very much followed the teachings of Calvin and the emerging Calvinist orthodoxy. It also followed Calvin in wanting a measure of self-government for the church, independent of too much state interference. Many within the state government, however, wanted to keep strong limits on church independence, because Calvinists sometimes became too strict and too demanding.

While the church as a whole was quite orthodox and disciplined, there were those who dissented. Some were publicly disciplined, but others seem to have dissented quietly or privately. The most famous of these quiet dissenters was Jacobus Arminius.



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The Synod of Dort - Cont'd

While the value of the death of Christ is inherently infinite, and so sufficient to save the whole world, His intention in dying was to pay for all the sins of the elect alone.

Arminius was a brilliant student, studying for a time in Geneva in the days of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor as the most prominent minister there.

Arminius returned from Geneva to serve as a Reformed minister in the church of Amsterdam from 1588 to 1603. In 1603, he was appointed to be a professor of theology at the most distinguished Dutch university at Leiden. He served there just six years until his death in 1609. Throughout his career as a pastor and professor, he wrote several works critical of aspects of Calvinist theology, but he did not publish any of them in his lifetime.

Although he did not publish, Arminius did influence fellow ministers and students by his teaching. After his death, in 1610, some forty-two ministers signed a petition to the state asking for toleration and protection for their views. They knew that their views would be disciplined in the churches and so appealed for the state to protect them from ecclesiastical discipline.

These Arminians in their petition, or "Remonstrance," summarized their theological deviations from Calvinism, for which they sought toleration, in five points. The original five points were the five points of Arminianism: conditional election, unlimited atonement, serious depravity, resistible grace, and uncertainty about perseverance.

When word leaked out about this Remonstrance, the Calvinists reacted sharply and angrily. They began to insist on the calling of a national synod to evaluate and judge the five points of the Arminians—the last thing the Arminians or many leaders of the state wanted. For eight years, these issues were debated, and the churches were increasingly stressed and troubled.

Finally, after a coup d'état in the state, the national synod was called to meet in the city of Dordrecht in November 1618. The Arminians complained that they could not receive a fair trial at such a synod, so the Dutch invited representatives from Reformed churches throughout Europe to come as delegates. The great Synod of Dort became a truly international synod. Delegates came from Great Britain, various parts of Germany, German-speaking Switzerland, and Geneva. The synod was a very distinguished gathering of many of the best Reformed minds in Europe. The synod had about ninety ecclesiastical delegates and met for nearly six months.

The great result of the work of the synod is known as the Canons of Dort. Canon is from a Greek word for a rule. The Canons of Dort are the rules of the Synod of Dordrecht, giving the Reformed answer to the five points of Arminianism.

The Canons of Dort are divided into "Heads of Doctrine," answering the Arminian points. Each of the heads is divided into several articles, positively developing the Reformed teaching on that point. And at the end of each head is a section called the "Rejection of Errors," answering specific Arminian errors.

Following the order of the Arminian five points, the Synod's first head of doctrine was on election. The canons answered the Arminian teaching of conditional election. Conditional election means that God elects a category of people to life if they meet His chosen qualification.



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The Synod of Dort - Cont'd

The Arminians stressed that faith is the foreseen qualification in order to be numbered among the elect. In this theology, faith is turned into the one good work required of man.

In contrast, the canons teach that election depends only on the good pleasure of God. Faith is the gift of God given to those who are elect, not the foundation of election.

God is sovereign in every part of salvation according to His eternal purpose.

*Luther had said that he would rather have his salvation in God's hands than in his own.
Dort reiterated and clarified that truth. Christ alone and grace alone indeed.*

The second head of doctrine was on the extent of Christ's saving work on the cross. The Arminians insisted that Christ had died for all of the sins of all people. They wanted to be able to say to everyone, "Christ died for all your sins." The question that must be asked is, If Christ died for all the sins of all persons, are all saved? No, the Arminians say, because you have to believe in Christ to share in the benefits of His death. But, as John Owen showed so brilliantly in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, if unbelief is a sin, then Christ died for it, and if unbelief is not a sin, then you cannot be condemned for it. But the Arminian error is more than teaching a theology that does not make sense. The greatest error is that it makes Christ a potential Savior rather than a complete one.

The position of the canons on the death of Christ has often been characterized as teaching a limited atonement. The canons were not primarily on the limited nature of Christ's death but on the effectiveness of it. Christ did not die to make salvation possible but to make it actual. As the Belgic Confession put it, Christ is not half a Savior. While the value of the death of Christ is inherently infinite and so sufficient to save the whole world, His intention in dying was to pay for all the sins of the elect alone. The death of Christ will certainly save the elect.

The synod combined the third and fourth heads of doctrine because the Arminians' third point seemed to teach total depravity, which is to say, the complete helplessness of mankind lost in sin. Only in combination with their fourth point does it become clear that their teaching of the resistibility of grace actually undermines their contention of total depravity.

The canons in response stress the complete lostness and helplessness of sinners and so the absolute necessity of irresistible grace to renew and enliven the hearts of the elect dead in sin. Taken together, the third and fourth heads of doctrine examine carefully the fallen human condition and the ways in which grace works in the hearts and lives of God's people.

The fifth head of doctrine responds to Arminian uncertainty as to whether those enlivened or regenerated by grace will certainly persevere in grace or may fall away from grace and life. The canons strongly teach that God preserves His elect in grace so that they will persevere in grace and faith to the end. All of these teachings of the canons are intended to comfort and reassure Christians "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).



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The Synod of Dort - Cont'd

For many Christians today, the teachings of the Canons of Dort seem narrow and irrelevant. In a world where many reject Christ altogether and where Christian cooperation in missions and cultural endeavors seems so important, some Christians think that we can ignore or at least marginalize such theological concerns. Such a position appeals to many. But is it right? The Canons of Dort proclaim a God-centered, Christ-centered religion that is more needed today than in the seventeenth century. God's sovereignty and Christ's perfect atonement are our only hope and confidence. Truly, the Synod of Dort preserved the Reformation. Luther had said that he would rather have his salvation in God's hands than in his own. Dort reiterated and clarified that truth. Christ alone and grace alone indeed. Here is something truly to celebrate. ~ *Dr. W. Robert Godfrey*

Spring Theology Conference 2019

Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church

This year the Spring Theology Conference took place on March 12th through the 14th, 2019 at the Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church located in Simpsonville, South Carolina. Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). They are a Presbyterian and Reformed body faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the whole counsel of God, and the relevance of God's word for all of life.

The topic of discussion was **Amazing Grace**: 400 years after Dort also known as the Synod of Dort. Speakers included Dr. Ian Hamilton (Calvinism: More than the Five Points), Reverend Daniel Hyde (Historical Significance of the Synod of Dort), Reverend Jeffrey Kingswood (Total Depravity), Dr. Tony Curto (Unconditional Election), Dr. Ryan McGraw (Particular Redemption), Dr. Joseph Pipa, Jr. (Effectual Calling), Dr. Jonathan Master (Perseverance of the Saints) and Reverend Philip Proctor (Pastoral Use of the Five Points).



Dr. Ian Hamilton, DD

He is an ordained Minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW) and a member of the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Board of Trustees



Reverend Jeffrey Kingswood

He is Senior Pastor of Grace Associated Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario, and a member of the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Board of Trustees



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Reverend Daniel Hyde

He is Senior Pastor of Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California



Dr. Tony Curto

He is Associate Professor of Missions and Apologetics at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina



Dr. Ryan McGraw

He is the Morton H. Smith Professor of Systematic Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina



Dr. Jonathan Master

He is Dean of the School of Divinity and Professor of Theology at Cairn University, Langhorne, Pennsylvania



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Dr. Joseph Pipa, Jr.

He is the President and Professor of Systematic and Homiletical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina



Reverend Philip Proctor

He is Senior Pastor of Sterling Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Sterling, Virginia

Denying Dualism

The Devil-as-myth view is Satan's right-hand punch. If that one doesn't get you, then watch out for his left hook. The left-hand attack moves the disinformation to the opposite extreme. If Satan can't get you to ignore him by denying his very existence, he will cunningly lead you to attribute power to him far beyond what he actually possesses. He will seek to persuade you that he is virtually equal to God.

Dualism, as a philosophy and a religion, has vied with Christianity from the beginning. Dualism affirms that the universe is the staging area, the combat zone, for two equal and opposite beings who struggle with each other eternally.

Satan is falsely described in terms of omniscience, omnipresence, and the power to do actual, not merely counterfeit, miracles. He is given attributes orthodox Christianity labels as the incommunicable attributes of God and he is assigned power over nature that rivals the Creator's.

The Bible teaches that Satan is a finite spiritual being. He is temporal and created. In a word, he is a creature. He is more powerful than we, but he is not omnipotent. He is not immutable, as God is. Indeed, Satan's mutability is profound. His most obvious mutation is his fall. He was created a good angel. He fell from his original righteousness and is now totally malevolent. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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Preach the Word

Every season of reformation and every hour of spiritual awakening has been ushered in by a recovery of biblical preaching. This cause and effect is timeless and inseparable. J.H. Merle D'Aubigné, a noted Reformation historian, writes, *"The only true reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God."* That is to say, as the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

Such was the case in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others were raised up by God to lead His church in this era. At the forefront, it was their recovery of expository preaching that helped launch this religious movement that turned Europe and, eventually, Western civilization upside down. With *sola Scriptura* as their battle cry, a new generation of biblical preachers restored the pulpit to its former glory and revived Apostolic Christianity.

The same was true in the golden era of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. A recovery of biblical preaching spread like wild fire through the dry religion of Scotland and England. A resurgence of authentic Christianity came as an army of biblical expositors—John Owen, Jeremiah Burroughs, Samuel Rutherford, and others—marched upon the kingdoms of England and Scotland with an open Bible and uplifted voice. In its wake, the monarchy was shaken and history was altered.

The eighteenth century witnessed exactly the same. The Bible-saturated preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Tennents thundered through the early Colonies. The Atlantic seaboard was electrified with the proclamation of the gospel, and New England was taken by storm. The Word was preached, souls were saved, and the kingdom expanded.

The fact is, the restoration of biblical preaching has always been the leading factor in any revival of genuine Christianity. Philip Schaff writes, *"Every true progress in church history is conditioned by a new and deeper study of the Scriptures."* That is to say, every great revival in the church has been ushered in by a return to expository preaching.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preacher at Westminster Chapel, London, stated, *"The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is the greatest need of the world also."* If his diagnosis is correct, and this writer believes it is, then a return to true preaching—biblical preaching, expository preaching—is the greatest need in this critical hour. If a reformation is to come to the church, it must begin in the pulpit.

In his day, the prophet Amos warned of an approaching famine, a deadly drought that would cover the land. But this famine was not an absence of mere food or water, for this scarcity would be far more fatal. It would be a famine for hearing God's Word (Amos 8:11). Surely, the church today finds itself in similar days of shortage. Tragically, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, doctrine with drama, theology with theatrics, and preaching with performances. What is so desperately needed today is for pastors to return to their highest calling—the divine summons to *"preach the word"* (2 Timothy 4:1–2).

What is expository preaching? The Genevan Reformer John Calvin explained, *"Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace."* In other words, God is unusually present, by His Spirit, in the preaching of His Word.



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Preach the Word - Cont'd

Such preaching starts in a biblical text, stays in it, and shows its God-intended meaning in a life-changing fashion.

This was the final charge of Paul to young Timothy: *“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”* (2 Timothy 4:2). Such preaching necessitates declaring the full counsel of God in Scripture. The entire written Word must be expounded. No truth should be left untaught, no sin unexposed, no grace unoffered, no promise undelivered.

A heaven-sent revival will only come when Scripture is enthroned once again in the pulpit. There must be the clarion declaration of the Bible, the kind of preaching that gives a clear explanation of a biblical text with compelling application, exhortation, and appeal.

Every preacher must confine himself to the truths of Scripture. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. The man of God has nothing to say apart from the Bible. He must not parade his personal opinions in the pulpit. Nor may he expound worldly philosophies. The preacher is limited to one task—to preach the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, *“I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God’s Word into our sermons.”* This remains the crying need of the hour.

May a new generation of strong men step forward and speak up, and may they do so loud and clear. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson is founder and president of OnePassion Ministries and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow**

The Servant Leader Is Focused

The Lord Jesus Christ had no time for divided loyalties. He warned that *“no one can serve two masters”* (Matthew 6:24). Part-time devotion isn’t an option for the true servant of the Lord.

The apostle Paul was acutely aware of this reality in Christian ministry and commanded Timothy to *“take pains with these things; be absorbed in them”* (1 Timothy 4:15). A servant leader is single-minded, as opposed to *the double-minded man, who is unstable in all his ways* (James 1:8). The work of ministry is to absorb Timothy’s mind. Paul’s words here convey the idea of thinking through beforehand, planning, strategizing, or premeditating. When a minister is not doing the work of the ministry, he’s at least to be planning it.

The English Standard Version translates Paul’s exhortation with similar emphasis: *“Practice these things, immerse yourself in them.”* God’s servants are to be wrapped up in ministry matters. It doesn’t take much of a man to be a minister—it merely requires all of him. The true servant of Jesus Christ is wholly given over to his work.

A pastor can’t have a double agenda. He can’t, for example, divide his efforts between being in the ministry and becoming a golf pro or an entrepreneur. Men who fall into such traps never realize their full potential because they have too many things to distract them and drain their energy.



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The Servant Leader Is Focused - Cont'd

A good servant of Christ must bury himself in his ministry, just like Epaphroditus, who nearly died fulfilling his calling (Philippians 2:25–27).

In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul tells Timothy to “*preach the word; be ready.*” Greek scholar Fritz Rienecker tells us that the word translated “*ready*” (*ephistēmi*) is a military word. It means to stay at your post, to stay on duty. A servant of God is never off duty but is always at his post. My dad used to tell me that a preacher ought to be ready to preach, pray, or die at a moment’s notice.

Paul told Timothy to stay on duty “*in season and out of season*” (2 Timothy 4:2). A servant of Christ is on duty when it’s convenient and when it’s not. I went home one Sunday night and was really tired. All I wanted to do was get something cold to drink, sit in a chair, and rest. I had no sooner sat down when the phone rang. A family was having major problems. I spent forty minutes on the phone, during which time the food my daughter had prepared for me became inedible. As soon as I hung up the phone, it rang again—and it was a bigger disaster this time. I suppose that was the Lord’s way of letting me know that I’m always on duty. That’s how it is in ministry—you have to be totally absorbed in it and ready for anything.

The servant leader’s focus cannot be divided. He is to be absorbed and immersed in the work of shepherding his flock. It is all-consuming work, but there is no greater labor to which you could surrender your life. ~ **Dr. John McArthur**

How Not to Study the End Times

Eschatology, the study of the last things, is a fancy word for something we all already do. All of us think about the end. Yes, our culture and our fears push to the periphery thoughts of our death and the life hereafter. But count on it: at some point in your life, you are going to agonize over what will happen to you after you breathe your last. You can’t attend a funeral—whether of a religious or nonreligious person—without hearing somebody’s eschatology, their concept of what happens after death. We are all eschatologists. But that doesn’t mean we always engage the end times well. In at least three ways, we could go wrong in this most basic theological discipline.

1. We are tempted to engage in speculative eschatology. When end-times study is not rooted in Scripture, it becomes vain dreaming, the dogmatization of our wishes. In a time of unfathomable suffering and pain, Job asked his mostly well-meaning friends, “*How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood*” (Job 21:34). When it comes to matters of eternal life and death, we need more than “empty nothings.” We need more than traditional religious rituals and mantras that suggest, sometimes superficially, that the best is yet to come. The effervescent goal of living a decent life falls pitifully short of guaranteeing a blessed eternity. Vague wishes of a better afterlife are impotent to deliver solid hope. Speculative eschatology is a sign of biblical illiteracy and spiritual immaturity. When it comes to the end times, we need to put childish ways behind us and listen to what God says.



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How Not to Study the End Times

2. We should beware of argumentative eschatology. For some of us, the very topic of the end times is off-putting because it can be such a contentious issue. Some of us have felt our Christianity questioned by those who have a different concept of the end. But surely God does not peel back the curtains of future history, giving us a glimpse into the staggering profundity of death and judgment or the glorious return of the King of heaven that we might contend with other Christians over how things will work out. It is certainly possible—and necessary—to distinguish between two conflicting end-times views without needlessly blustering about the perceived superiority of one's own view.
3. We must avoid avoiding eschatology. It sounds pious to say, "I don't think much about the last things. I know God is in control. I'll leave it up to Him." Is eschatology even necessary? Isn't it enough to simply trust that God will work everything out in the end? Should we not approach this topic with the attitude of David, who said, "*I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.*" (Psalm 131:1)?

Instead, Scripture teaches us to develop what some have called an "*apocalyptic spirituality*" in which we so deeply sense the dawning of the age to come that we begin to realize its wonder in this present age. The Apostle Peter captures in a single phrase Scripture's unified application of eschatology. In light of God's plan to purify the cosmos, he asks, "*What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?*" (2 Peter 3:11). With Peter, Jesus (Mark 13:35–37) and Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:6) call God's people to respond to the coming of the end with watchful sobriety. The same emphasis is found in Hebrews 10:25; seeing "*the Day drawing near*" ought to strengthen our hope, devote us to worship, and galvanize us in our expressions of love and good works. If Christ is returning, if His judgment will be eternal, and if hell is as terrible as heaven is delectable, then studying the end times is eminently practical. Those who lose sight of the end can become careless in their conduct and arrogant in their rejection of God (2 Peter 3:1–7). By contrast, a biblical eschatology provides a rationale for ethics that goes deeper than pragmatic concerns. With God's help, eschatology can chill our blood at the thought of sin and judgment, and it can warm our hearts with God's gracious work of redemption.

God invites us to meditate on the future, not to speculate or altercate but to better share His perspective on this life and the life to come. And this is how we should study the topic. The way Scripture and the church's historic confessions teach eschatology is much more like gazing upon a dazzling sunset than analyzing and describing the chemical properties of the sun. We need more than a skeletal, technical, clinical understanding of the end times. We need a robust eschatological vision that can invigorate us with the reality that God's last work will change everything and that the change has already begun. ~ *William Boekestain - Pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - April 2019

Birthdays

Nehemiah W. (1)
Amber H. (4)
Carol L. (7)
David A. (8)
Jeremy W. (26)

Anniversary

Walt and Carol L. (15)

Foolish Children Need Wise Fathers

There are times when God reaches out His restraining hand and catches His child before he runs out into a street of sin chasing after a ball of worldly desire. There is a deadly danger there that God’s grace and Christ’s atonement protects us from as we grow into mature faith. There are other times when that same Fatherly hand pulls back from the child who ignores the warnings and reaches for the hot pan. The temporary sting of sin is a protective grace that instructs and reminds us that sin is a viper to be killed not a puppy to be cuddled. The Father’s soothing hand then moves in quickly as we confess our foolishness and rebellion to provide the greater reminder that though we are at times very poor sons and daughters, we are sons and daughters nonetheless. And we will never be anything less-precious children who will one day grow up to be like our eldest brother, Jesus. ~ *Anonymous*



**West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership**

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