

## 5 Points of Calvinism #1-Salvation From God Alone

*The Five Points of Calvinism*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 62  
**Preached on:** Sunday, July 2, 1978

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What would you tell them what the Reformed faith was? In its essence, what would you tell them? They asked you and they said, "Well, what's the difference between the Reformed and that which is not Reformed?" What would you tell them? What would you seize upon as the principle which would be most essential to their understanding what the Reformed faith really is?

There's an old proverb among the Indian people about some men that came to examine an elephant. You've all heard it, but I'll tell it again. They were all blind, these four men, and they came to examine the elephant. They couldn't see the beast as a whole, and so they had to kind of reach out and take a hold of whatever aspect of it they could, and one of them took a hold of the great beast's ear and he said, "Well, for the life of me, I would say that an elephant must be like a great tree with leaves." And another one took a hold of the tail of the beast and he held on to it and he felt it and he said, "Well," he said, "I must say that this beast must be like some kind of a serpent." And another one took a hold of the leg and he felt around it and he held on to it and he said, "Well, I'm just sure that this beast is like a great oak tree." And so on it went because each of them was holding on to a portion of the beast, but he was too blind, as it were, to see the beast as a whole.

And you know, that's the way a lot of people are when it comes to the Reformed faith, and that's the way people were back at the time of the Reformation. They get a hold of some aspect of the Reformed faith and they take a hold of that and they are blind, they are natural men, and they are not able to see or understand the things of the Spirit, and so they conjure up for themselves a very distorted and indeed monstrous idea of what the Reformed faith really is. Some people hear about the doctrine of man's total depravity and they say, "Oh, what a horrible beast that is, that Reformed faith. It teaches that man is totally depraved. Well, I could never accept a religion like that." But what does the Reformed faith really say about man? Is that all it teaches, that man is totally depraved in his nature and that every aspect and part of his soul and body have been damaged by the fall into sin so that, as the book of Genesis puts it, every thought of the intent of man's heart by nature is only evil continually, so that there is no man that does good and sins not, so that there is no man who by nature seeks God? Now, what is the Reformed faith insisting upon a doctrine like this for in a day in which man believes in the goodness of man? You know, the basic idea of man today in Western culture is the evolutionistic idea

of man, and that is basically the idea that man is normal. He may not be a finished product because evolution may go on for many, many centuries and man may at last, after many, many centuries, even millions of years, reach the pinnacle of perfection, but now at least he is natural, that is to say, there's nothing fundamentally wrong with him that the process of evolution will not cure. And if there are any defects, well, they're certainly not man's fault. I see that every time I go out to the alcoholic rehabilitation center because the number one thing that those men are taught and the thing that they come to believe is that they're not guilty and they're not sinful, they're just naturally built that way. And alcoholism is a disease. It's not a sin. It's a kind of thing that just happens to be built into them because they are not finished products yet in the evolutionistic scale.

Well, the idea that man has today, you see, is that he is basically good because he's normal and the whole idea that man is depraved, that is to say a fallen creature who because of his fall has suffered what we call a vitiation, a damage to all of his nature, his mind and his heart and his will and his body, his soul, everything about him, so that he is not able anymore to think the thoughts of God after him and he's not able anymore to turn himself to the Lord and to seek him while he may be found. The Bible says that God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did good, to see if there were any that did seek God and what does the Bible say? "No, not one, not even one. They've all gone astray. They've all turned to their own way," and so on. And so the Bible says that there is in man no good, not from the top of his head to the soul of his feet.

But why does the Reformed faith insist on teaching this? Well, let me tell you why. It's because we want men to know exactly what David discovered in Psalm 62 and what David discovered here in Psalm 62 is that only in God is there salvation. It's not in man. What a tremendous discovery. He says, "Only for God waits my soul in silence." Why does that have to be said? Well, because from him is my salvation. "He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold: I shall not be moved." Well, now that's what David's saying here in Psalm 62. He discovered this, you see, and he goes back again, says it over again in verse 5, "Only for God waits my soul in silence because my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation." And then he comes down to the end of that Psalm and he hammers it home and he says, "Look, God said this once and he said it twice. Once God has spoken twice, I have heard this, that power belongs to God."

So if you ever want to understand the Reformed faith, you can't just take hold of the doctrine of total depravity. That's important but it's only important as an aspect of the whole elephant, as it were, and what you've got to see is that the whole elephant amounts to this: God is our Savior. We are not our own Savior. There's not anything in my salvation that I can claim as my own original contribution. It all comes from God. And that's why the doctrine of total depravity is there. It's like the great feet of the great beast there, you see, but it's only there because it's in relation to the beast.

We must not misunderstand this. If all I had to say was that man is totally depraved, well then it would be a monstrous thing. It would be grotesque. It would be a terrible thing. But that's not all. There's a lot more to it than that. That's the point, you see, about the

Reformed faith and that's why the Synod of Dort came to consider these things and to sit down and to try to clear away these false allegations and misunderstandings.

Well, another doctrine, of course, is the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, the idea that God, from all eternity, has chosen some men in Christ to be eternally saved. Well, you know what that's like in the eyes of the world, that's just a horrible thing. It's like that blind man taking hold of the tail of the elephant and to him, that elephant is a hideous serpent-like creature because that's all he can see is the doctrine of divine predestination. And there are people that way when it comes to the Reformed faith and it greatly upsets them to talk about the absolute sovereignty of God because today man likes to think that he is sovereign, that he is the one who can take charge of the universe, and even now they're talking about taking charge of man's evolution. It will no longer be just a blind chance sort of thing. It will be a kind of thing in which man himself takes the directing authority and guides and directs the process of evolution. Man becomes more and more in his own eyes God today. Well, the Bible says, no, man is dead in sin and he's helpless and he can't do anything to save himself and so God is the one who has done something about it and the first person of the Godhead is the Father, and it is the Father who from before the foundation of the world, knowing all of these things beforehand, foreseeing the fall of man, realizing what man's condition is going to be, God from all eternity has chosen some to everlasting life and that's what is taught right there in the book of Ephesians. "He has chosen us in him from before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us to the adoption of children, to the praise of the glory of his grace."

Now that means, in other words, that salvation is from God and that's what David is talking about here. He says, "I discovered this and I came to realize that salvation is in God. It's not in man." It's not a 50-50 proposition in which God does his part and you do his part and then you go into the kingdom of heaven. It's not even a proposition in which God does 90% and you do 10% and the you go into the kingdom of God. It's all God's work. And so when you see the doctrine of predestination, the doctrine of sovereign election of some to everlasting life in relationship to this other doctrine, you're beginning to see the whole thing, you see, and you're beginning to see that the heart and core of it is simply the fact that God is our Savior, we don't save ourselves. And our salvation comes from the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And it is the Father who out of his mere good pleasure, out of his pure goodness and mercy, out of a race that didn't deserve it and was not seeking it, chose a great multitude that no man can number to everlasting life.

You know, to this day, when people think that they've heard something about the Reformed faith because they've heard the word "predestination," they've heard the word "election," right away, they begin to draw a false caricature and they say, "Why, those terrible Reformed people, they're the ones that believe that God has only chosen a few to be saved while all the rest go to hell. I don't believe that." They didn't believe that when they wrote the Canons of Dort. I believe because the Bible says that God has chosen a great multitude that no man can number out of every tongue and tribe and nation. But that doesn't change the fact that God chose them from before the foundation of the world and that's why they're going to be saved.

And then after God, the Father chose them, he sent Christ Jesus, his Son, into the world to die for them and that's something that he did all by himself too. We didn't help him do it. And the great issue here, and this is the thing that offends men, is this: did Christ come to do something for all or did he come to do all for some? Did Christ come down here to this world to build a great, big, wide bridge that reaches halfway across the torrent of man's sin and iniquity, leaving the other half for man to swim by himself so that everybody can get on the bridge, but then you have to get over to the other side by yourself? Or did the Lord Jesus Christ come to give his life a ransom for many? Did he come, in other words, to pay the full and complete and total price for the sins of some, or did he come to pay part of the price for the sins of everybody? Well, all around you today in the church, the answer that people would give is that Christ came to do something for everybody but that's not what the Bible teaches. No, the Lord Jesus Christ himself on the night in which he was betrayed and he was about ready to suffer, he said it out of his own mouth, "Father, I do not pray for the world. I pray for all those that you've given me." He did not come to die for all men. That's just not in the Bible. He came to die for his people. "His name shall be called Jesus," said the angel, "for he shall save his people from their sins." And Christ is talking about himself as the great shepherd, and he says, "The shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." It's not in the Bible that Christ came to die for all men without exception so that they could be partly saved and then do the rest themselves by some act of their own free will. That's not in the Bible. What the Bible says is that God the Father chose us in him, in Christ, from before the foundation of the world and then in the fullness of time, Christ came down here to pay the complete penalty for the sins of his people.

Everything has been done for some and the world doesn't like that. They say, "Oh, how terrible." See, it's not fair in the eyes of the world that God should do 100% for some and nothing for the others but that's because they don't realize that man has forfeited all rights. He doesn't have any rights, you see, and it's the right of God to give salvation to whom he will. And then you see, you're beginning to see the whole thing. Well, now you go on then to the work of the Holy Spirit and what does the Bible teach? Well, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is the one who quickens us. "You were dead in your trespasses and sin," says Paul writing to the Ephesians. You were dead. Well, you sure, as the world, didn't raise yourself from the dead. "No," he says. He quickened you, made you alive, raised you up, and made you to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. "For it is by grace, the unmerited free favor of God, that you are saved through faith and that is not of yourself, it is the gift of God and not of works lest any man should boast."

So if you have faith today, you can't boast and say, "Well, I did it." We all tend to say that, but that's not what we should say. Here's the way Spurgeon, a great Reformed Baptist, put it remarkably clearly, "Well do I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace. Born as all of us are by nature and Arminian, I still believed things I had continually heard and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all by myself but then one day I was sitting in the house of God when the thought suddenly came to me, How did you come to be a Christian? Well, came the answer, I sought the Lord. But how did you come to seek the Lord came the answer again. And then the truth flashed in my mind in a moment. I never would have sought

him at all unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him. Then in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, that he was the author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my confession, I ascribe my change wholly to God."

And so you talk about the depravity of man, you talk about the absolute sovereignty of God in choosing some men to eternal life, and you talk about Christ and his definite atonement, dying for some men only to pay the full price their sin, and you talk about the irresistible, efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit which wakes them from the dead so that they can believe and repent, and you know what you're saying in all that? You're saying, "Listen to me, man, and listen to me clear: God saves, not man," saying exactly the same thing you find in Psalm 62. Only for God. You say, only. Emphasize that word. That's the word in the Hebrew that that Psalm begins with. Only from God. That's what it's saying. "He only is my rock and my salvation. That's why I'm not going to be moved because my salvation is from God." And that's where you come, you see, to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Now, if it really is true that God has chosen me from all eternity, and if it really is true that Christ did everything that needed to be done to save me, and if it really is true that the Holy Spirit has created me as a new creature so that I could repent and believe, I can guarantee you I'm not going to be shaken. Not going to be moved because if God did it all, who's going to overthrow what God did? If I did part of it, well then it might be overthrown. Grant you that. But if God did it, who's going to overthrow the work of God? Are you going to overthrow the work of God? Do you think you're big enough to do that? Is the devil going to overthrow the work of God? Is he big enough to do that? If our salvation is 100% from God and not percent from man, nobody's going to overthrow it.

And that's also what the Reformed faith teaches in its doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. He who is saved by the grace of God is never going to be lost again. He's never going to fall away from faith and go to perdition. Well now that just happens to be what the Reformation was all about and when this alien doctrine called Arminianism began to creep into the churches back there, they called a synod and they met together and they formulated this and they said, "Don't take a hold of the tail or the foot or the ear and just make a monstrous caricature. Look at the whole thing and then realize that what we're on about here is the fact that God is the one who saves us and not we ourselves." And that's what the Reformed faith is and that's what it's all about and then you're going to understand what David goes on to say in this Psalm.

Now let's look at it for a moment. Okay, you've got his theme. His theme is this: only God. He alone. He's the one that saves. Nobody else. All right, now what does he say there in verse 3? He says, "And now I'm going to translate it literally again. How long are you going to set upon a man?" Now that's a very peculiar phrase. It's the only place in the Bible that that word appears and I think it's the nearest to our modern English expression is how long are you going to put man on? You know what a put on is, don't you? That's what the Psalmist is actually saying there, "How are you going to put man on that you may destroy him, all of you like a leaning wall and a tottering fence?" You've got a

leaning wall around your place, you've got a tottering fence around your place? Well, what do you do if you want that tottering fence to go smashing down to the ground? What do you do if you want that wall to go tumbling down like the walls of Jericho? Well, I'll tell you, all you have to do is put something on top of it. Put something heavy on top. Put something really heavy on top of that fence and it's going to go crashing down to the ground. And David noticed that in his day, that's what they were doing to man. They were putting something upon him that he couldn't really bear and what they were putting upon him was false teaching. What they were saying was that man wasn't as bad as the Bible says he is, and that man could do something to save himself. And so they said, "They have only counseled him to destroy him, to cast him down from his high position." You want to really destroy man all you have to do is teach him that he's better than he is. That'll destroy him better than anything else. You just load him down with honor and the sense of self-importance and you make him think that he can do it, he's okay, he's all right. That's the way to destroy man.

Now that's what the Psalmist is saying. "They delight in falsehood. They bless with their mouth. Man, you're all right," they say like that book that's very popular today, "I'm Okay, You're Okay." That's the modern attitude toward man. "I'm okay and you're okay, mate. Not to worry." Oh, there now you've really destroyed him. That'll do it better than anything else, better than machine guns or anything.

"They bless with their mouth but inwardly they curse." The devil says, "Boy, now I've really done it. I've got them." And that's the situation that prevails today in Western culture. What is the view of man that prevails in Western culture today? What is the view of man that your children are learning six hours a day, five days a week in the state schools? What is the view of man that comes to you relentlessly day after day through the mass media, the TV, the radio, the magazines and the rest of it? Well, I'll tell you what it is: it's the evolutionistic view of man. And why is this view so popular? Well, very simple, it's pleasant, it makes man feel better. Man is delighted to hear that he's not a sinner. If there's any problem, it's just evolution hasn't gone far enough yet. Like those alcoholics, "Man, that's not so bad. I'm this way just because I'm this way. Not my fault."

Man loves to hear that sort of thing because then he doesn't have to fear God anymore, and he doesn't have to fear hell anymore, he doesn't have to worry about damnation. So if you're a drunkard, they say, "Well, man, you're just programmed that way. It's a disease. You can't help it. It's like polio." You're a homosexual they say, "Well, that's not your fault. That's just the way you happen to be made." You see where you don't have to worry about sin anymore. Great churches today, to my amazement and sorrow, are starting to talk this way because they have been leavened so far by the doctrine of evolution and they're saying, "Well, if you're a homosexual, too bad maybe but you can't help it. It's not your fault." See, you load the man with honor, you make him feel, well, he's not so bad, you lift him up, as it were, with words and what are you doing? You are smashing that man down into a thousand pieces. That's what you're doing. You're really destroying him because then he's not down in the horrible pit and he doesn't have to cry out to God and say, "O God, my only hope is in you. Please, O God, please save me."

That's what's going on today. Man is being destroyed because of a false doctrine of man, a doctrine which says man is not that bad, he's not that helpless, he does not need a salvation that comes only from God and what does David say about all this? Well, look at verse 9, "Men of low degree are only vanity." You know what vanity is, don't you? It's a big zero. It's a big naught. "And men of rank are a lie." There's another big naught. They are together. You take all these people, the little guys and the big ones, the smart ones and the dumb ones, the alcoholics that believe the lie and the people that tell them the lie, you take them all together and you put them on the balance and what are they? Well, he says they're lighter than a breath of air and that just happens to be true. Doesn't mean a thing that all of your intellectuals today, most of them in a nation like this, believe the lie, doesn't help the lie at all, doesn't make any difference. It's still a lie. And this whole business of making man feel he doesn't need God and he doesn't have to feel that salvation must come from God or he won't have any salvation, doesn't matter how many people hold that lie and teach it, doesn't matter. They weigh absolutely nothing. That's what David said. That's what he learned.

And so he says don't trust in this sort of thing because they're lighter than a breath of air, and then he comes back to his theme again. He says, don't you realize God has said it once, he's said it twice. You see, God says something twice when it's absolutely essential that we listen and that we hear. And he says, God has said it. Look, salvation, the power belongs to God. If you think there is any power in man in this whole area of salvation, then you don't understand what the Bible is all about. If you think there's even one tiny mustard seed of ability or power or strength in man that you don't understand because it all comes back to God.

You know, if you go back and read the great creeds of the Christian church, you'll find that what I'm saying is true. The 39 Articles of the Church of England says what I'm saying. The Anglican Church doesn't say it anymore, but the 39 Articles say it. The Westminster Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand says what I'm saying today. The church doesn't say it anymore, but the creed does. And so does the historic creed of the Baptist Church and the historic creed of the Congregational Church. All of the great Reformation churches they once taught in the line of the Canons of Dort, but they don't anymore. Oh no, that's old fashioned. Well, it may be old fashioned but it still happens to be what the world needs now, because the terrible thing about our day and generation is this big put on.

What is the result of this false idea that man is basically good? Well, look around you if you've got eyes to see. I certainly saw it yesterday. I was climbing a hill and I found a corpse up there on the hill. A nice middle-aged New Zealand man, well-dressed, took his life. Well, why did he do that? Well, that's the end of the line, you see. That's where the modern philosophy of the humanist leads you. Life becomes absolutely impossible. But man doesn't cry out for God. He cries out for a drug to knock himself off. You see, that's where it's led us. It leads us not maybe to gas chambers yet, but they've got the next thing to it. They've got a baby killing factory right down here in Lower Hutt. That's where we're going, friends and we're going there because we have this false put on about man and he doesn't cry out anymore and say, "Lord God, if I'm to be saved, you're going to have to do it. I can't do it myself, and I need your help and your grace." Do you see?

Well, that's what the Reformed faith is all about and that's what we're supposed to be teaching and preaching in this day and age in which we live, and that's what you're supposed to be concerned about and believe. Do you believe it? Are you Reformed? Have you ever felt yourself to be down in that horrible pit until you cried out, "O God, have mercy upon me! You save me or I'm lost!" That's the Reformed faith and I hope that God will write it in your hearts. Amen.

Let us pray.

*We pray today, O God, for your grace. We need it so much. We can't save ourselves. Help us to realize just how desperate our situation is so that we may cry out to you as David did. It encourages us to see that David was surrounded also by many who talked the way people do today, and yet David saw through it and he came to realize that you and you only are Savior, strength, power. Lord, do the same for us that we may rejoice in your great name. This we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.*