

**Reformed Apologetics on the Calvinistic
doctrine of grace:
Calvinists response to the critics**

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PROOFREADING STATEMENT

This is to certify that I have read the research paper with the provisional title of *Reformed Apologetics on the Calvinistic Doctrine of Grace: Calvinists Response to the Critics* submitted by Mr. Zaldivar E. Acodesin; and have, to the best of my ability, carefully proofread and reviewed the statements made in this paper, that this research paper may conform to correct Standard English Grammar rules. Neither the research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

The undersigned guarantees the quality of English language in this paper.

This 23rd day of March 2018.



STEPHANIE L. BAUCAS
Principal editor

PREFACE

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear. And grace, my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'tis grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me. His word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures.

Yea when this flesh and heart shall fail, and mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil, a life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun.

(Newton, 1779)

Despite its age, Newton's Amazing Grace has not at all lost its vogue and has fittingly become an anthem of Christian churches. Its impact has been monumental, influencing not only church liturgy but also crossing over to secular music. Its classicality and restorative message, however passé its rhythm may be, have catapulted it to become a soulful icon of Christianity. Although it may have been revised and covered by musicians from across different genres in keeping with modern music, and multiple versions have sprung from it, it may be said that its central message remains to be as powerful as when it was first written. Parallel to this, while the doctrine of God's amazing grace may be preached in different traditions, diverse approaches and dynamic flairs to catch the attention of an audience, its truth and fundamental message ought not to be altered in any way for the mere purpose of pleasing the crowd, its message should not be bent to the whims of human desire, it should not be influenced by what is deemed to be vogue by the changing society, rather, biblical doctrines shall transform humanity. Instead of reshaping the grace doctrine, we ought to allow the truth to shape us so that we may come to the knowledge of who God is. We ought to construe it irrespective of our own prejudices so that it may usher us to that novel purpose in our Christian life.

This paper is about the amazing grace of God and its cosmic role in the lives of Christians who come to know of its truth. God marks eternity. He never changes, so is His grace to us human beings. It is safe to conclude that God's grace and its truth is constant in its nature and unchanging in its message despite of the inconstant and fickle penchant of humanity.

This study shall aid a potential reader to comprehend the unrelenting debate on the doctrine of grace through a comparative analysis of the different faith-views on the doctrine; its ultimate purpose is for the reader to realize how amazing God's grace is, then and even now. The grace debate is broad and sporadic; however, this paper generally assumes a debate between two parties, which is merely in fact a component of the debate – between the Arminians who advocate libertarian human free, which is also the prevailing view in contemporary Christianity; and the Calvinists who advocate compatibilist freedom in the name of God's sovereignty, which generally describes the belief of traditional Christianity. This paper aims to incite a deeper appreciation of God's grace, so that it may not be a mere doctrine used meaninglessly as a scapegoat to evade metaphysical punishment. Calvin toiled to present his appreciation of this grace through his many prolific writings. Luther expressed his deep resent against those who refitted the doctrine for greed in his Ninety-five Theses. Paul emphasized on it in his gospel writings and even suffered imprisonment and other kinds of persecutions for the sake of the gospel truth of grace. Ultimately, God's grace was revealed and demonstrated in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

This paper aims at no loftiness than to bring all glory to our God and shift focus on why God had sent His only begotten Son in that specific period in history for the salvation of the past, present, and future generations. It can only be said that Jesus' death on the cross, the grace of God Himself, is our assurance of His love and mercy towards us and the necessary justification for all loose questions in the debate. It may be said that in the quest for the answer to theological inquiry, Jesus Himself is the perfect apologetic.

Zaldivar E. Acodesin
Potchefstroom, South Africa
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically present the response of Calvinists on the arguments against Reformed theology on the soteriological doctrine of grace and its role on Christian living, on the forgiveness of sin and to the salvation of human beings. This paper will present the arguments against and the counterclaims for the Calvinistic concept of grace and will also discuss the significance of Calvin's theology on grace and of the Calvinist apologetics in contemporary Christianity.

This dogmatic study will be approached from a Reformed tradition perspective. The researcher shall perform the following research methodologies: a) exegesis of biblical passages limited in scope to the Pauline epistles to the Ephesians, more particularly in Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9; b) review of existing relevant literature through the hermeneutical cycle; c) Reformed apologetics on Calvin's theology of grace; and, d) comparative analysis.

And key terms: Reformed apologetics, Calvinistic theology, and grace.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie beoog om sistematies die Calvinistiese reaksie teen die teenhandeling rakende die Gereformeerde teologie oor die soteriologiese leerstelling, asook die rol wat dit speel in 'n Christelike leefwyse, in die vergewing van sonde en in die redding van die mense te bespreek. Hierdie tesis sal die teenargumente, asook die argumente vir die Calvinistiese begrip van genade aanbied, sowel as die belangrikheid van Calvyn se teologie met betrekking tot genade asook die Calvinistiese apologetiek in hedendaagse Christelike geloof.

Hierdie dogmatiese studie sal vanuit die perspektief van die Gereformeerde tradisie benader word. Die volgende navorsingsmetodologie sal gepas wees vir hierdie studie: a) eksegeese van bybelse gedeeltes, beperk tot die Pauliniese sendbriewe aan die Efesiërs, meer spesifiek tot Efesiërs 1:5-7 en 2:8-9; b) hersiening van bestaande tersaaklike literatuur deur die hermeneutiese siklus; c) Gereformeerde apologetiek oor Calvin se teologie van genade; en, d) vergelykende analise.

Sleutelterme: Gereformeerde apologetiek, Calvinistiese teologie, genade.

ABBREVIATIONS

AMJ	Academy of Management Journal
AMR	Academy of Management Review
BC	Belgic Confession
CD	The Canons of Dort
CO	<i>Calvini Opera</i>
Comm.	Calvin's Commentaries
COR	<i>Calvini Opera Omnia denuo Recognita</i>
CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
DSO	Calvin's <i>Defensio Sanae et Orthodoxae</i>
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
Inst.	Institutes of the Christian Religion
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
KJV	King James Version
<i>LRR</i>	<i>La Revue Réformé</i>
NIV	New International Version
RP	Review of Politics
SBLGNT	SBL Greek New Testament
TB	Tyndale Bulletin
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WSCQ	Westminster Shorter Catechism Question
WLCQA	Westminster Larger Catechism Question and Answer

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE BOOKS

As recommended by NTSWA English (AOSIS, 2017:19):

Gn	Ex	Lv	Nm	Dt	Jos
Jdg	Rt	1 Sm	2 Sm	1 Ki	2 Ki
1 Chr	2 Chr	Ezr	Neh	Es	Job
Ps	Pr	Ec	Can	Is	Jr
Lm	Ezk	Dn	Hs	Jl	Am
Ob	Jnh	Mi	Nah	Hab	Zph
Hg	Zch	Ml			
Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn	Ac	Rm
1 Cor	2 Cor	Gl	Eph	Phlp	Col
1 Th	2 Th	1 Tm	2 Tm	Tt	Phlm
Heb	Ja	1 Pt	2 Pt	1 Jn	2 Jn
3 Jn	Jude	Rv			

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The doctrine that God extends His grace to the undeserving holds a central foundational dais in all Christian studies and theological inquiries. It is definitive of the link that God had established between Him and humanity which God could have easily dispensed with, to our desolation, but God chose not to. The Christian history is inundated with narratives and testimonies of God's grace that one must wonder what grace really is. For Christians, grace is not at all foreign. History is rich with the debates and factions formed out of this profound concept in Christianity.

Arminius, Calvin, Wesley, and Luther are famous in the grace debate circle. What may be more significant to note is that the same issues raised during the contemporaries of these sage grace advocates remain unresolved despite the voluminous literature and council gatherings throughout Christian history since the doctrine found its way to the centre of Christianity, instead of muting the debate, the issues raised then have become a foundation for more plausible arguments in contemporary grace discourses. The grace debate somehow keeps thriving and has even achieved more relevance in the church today. Eventually, one will realize that this doctrinal debate is quite repetitive but has also been intricately innovated with the passing of epochs and compounded with the complex questions and troubles of modern society. Despite its tedium, the debate cannot be ignored because it essentially underpins Christian faith and Christian living. It may be said that our perspectives about God's grace, reflect our knowledge of God and our ontological knowledge of ourselves in our being sinners.

Christians, however, ought not to be lost in this chaos. The Scripture laid out the basis for our understanding of the doctrine and we need only to inquire and exact whether the faith contentions are faithful and true to the gospel message. The apostle Paul may be said to be the greatest apologist for he firmly defended and forwarded the true message of the gospel of God's grace against those who intended to rob God of His glory and thus thwart the salvation

message by acknowledging human effort more than it does God's grace. Paul stood the ground of gospel truth. His followers did the same, Calvin being one of the staunchest. Calvin and his followers established a more systematic defence against detractors of the gospel message. Luther too hammered against the walls of those who claimed that salvation may be bought with human effort and sacrifice. Luther asserted that in God alone, by His grace, rests the salvation of sinners independent of human effort. While these grace contentions seem plausible, they however attracted the indignation of critiques who insisted on devising a different formula to salvation, which preyed on human ability. The same argument has proven unwearied. It remains a lingering contention, made more popular today by modern concepts of individuality and humanism – fawning the human person on a pedestal. The answer as to which faith is true is complicated by the assertion of the different contending groups that their theology is faithfully rooted in Scripture. In any debate, all sides would fervently stand by their claim, as in grace debates where each would claim that they have followed Paul. This however is logically negated by the fact that these same groups who profess to have faithfully followed Paul, have been debating against each other based on doctrinal discrepancies. These discrepancies are obvious manifestations of different interpretations of the same letter. Peter warns us when he spoke in the Scripture of these matters, he says of Paul's writings, "his [Paul] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pt 3:16; also cf. Jn 6:60-66 NIV, esp., v. 60¹). Today's denominated Christian churches are reminiscent of Peter's statements. Thus, this paper aims to present the grace debate through the eyes of one who breathes modernity but yearns to return to the contemporary of the Reformist fathers.

This chapter presents the aims and objectives of this study, the problem statements, the relevant questions to be answered, the methodology through which the questions were

¹ "On hearing it, many of His disciples said, 'this is a hard teaching; who can accept it;'" even Jesus' disciples themselves said that the doctrine of grace is hard to understand; this passage refers to predestination and reprobation, that some people are inexplicably drawn to Jesus while others are just as inexplicably repelled by him, see Redd 2017 <https://tabletalkmagazine.com>

investigated and studied, and the context of the different concepts which will be repeatedly used throughout the study.

1.2 Definition of key terms

1.2.1 Reformed Apologetics

Peter 3:15-16 NIV says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” This passage has laid the foundation for the engagement of apologetics as a method of dialectic polemics to defend Christian beliefs (Rezkalla, 2012). In principle, apologetics in Greek, απολογία means “a plea or a legal defence of oneself” (Kypros-Net Inc., 2003). Historically, in ancient Athens, it referred to a judicial procedure in courtrooms in defence of an accused. After the accusation, the defendant was allowed to refute the charges with a defence or reply (απολογία) to earn vindication. The accused would attempt to “speak away” (απών – away and λόγος – speech) the allegations (Batts, 1977:1). The classic example of such an *apologia* was Socrates’ defence against the charge of corrupting the young because of impiety, a defence retold by his most famous pupil, Plato, in a dialogue narrated in “The Apology” (Linder, 2002:3), in Greek, Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους.

Apologetics is the rational justification of Christian doctrines (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). It is the presentation of a logical, reasonable case for the truth of the Christian account of reality and human experience in the face of dissent. Markos (2010:17-23) writes that this discipline serves two important purposes – to reinforce the faith of believers and to remove obstacles to faith for the unbeliever. The primary goal of the practice is not for academic purpose to satisfy intellectual inquiry, but fundamentally, to draw people to Christ. Kreeft and Tacelli (2009:12) enumerated three reasons for engaging in apologetics:

1. To unbelievers – to lead up to faith
2. To believers – to build up faith and aid love
3. To engage in spiritual warfare.

According to Clark (2009:3-4), Alvin Plantinga is the leader of the recent revival in Christian philosophy and was Reformed epistemology's first contemporary defender; and Plantinga's home institution, Calvin College, supported other prominent philosophers in its development, including Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston and George Mavrodes.

Calvin (1845:22-23) contends that people are accountable to God for their unbelief, not because they have failed to submit to a convincing theistic proof, but because they have suppressed the truth which God implanted within them. "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" (Rm 2:14-16 NIV).

1.2.2 Calvinistic theology and tradition

Allen (2010:3) gave a simple yet substantial description of the Reformed tradition. He wrote, "Frequently, the term reformed is used synonymously and interchangeably with Calvinistic teachings, which refers fundamentally to a person's predestinarian beliefs about Christian salvation." The Reformed view of predestination entails affirmation to the salvific design in which God unconditionally chose who will be saved and who will be damned, prior to those individuals doing anything of (de) merits (Donnelly, 1976:131-132). This doctrine is encompassed with views that Christ effectively died to save the elect and that their salvation cannot be lost. This Reformed belief system is encapsulated in the acronym TULIP², a convenient way of describing the so-called 'Five Points of Calvinism'³ as affirmed by the Reformed canons of Dort (1619), the ecclesiastical affirmations made in the early seventeenth century. The TULIP was formulated as a response to the five-point manifesto (the Remonstrance) penned by certain Belgic semi-

² Total depravity – Unconditional election – Limited atonement – Irresistible grace – and Perseverance of the saints; see full definition, Steele and Thomas *Five Points of Calvinism* 24-57.

³ These points will be further discussed in answering the questions of this paper and will be included in the succeeding chapters.

Pelagians (Packer, 1926:1-25). The TULIP is also frequently referred to as the “doctrines of grace” as it highlights the free nature of God’s salvation of human beings, the undeserving plight of the recipient, and the limitless sovereignty of God. With this, we can infer that the Calvinistic theology is quite systematic in its dogmatic approach on God’s grace.

According to Leith (1981:17), “Tradition and the gospel are indissolubly united. Each is indispensable to the other and to the life of the Christian community. The gospel is God’s will for human beings and for salvation as it has been worked out and disclosed in God’s revelation of Himself, especially in that segment of history culminating in Jesus Christ and in the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Tradition is the authoritative delivery of this gospel from believer to believer, from community to community, from generation to generation. Thus, tradition has two uses. It may refer to the *act* of passing on, and it may refer to *what* is passed on. The New Testament speaks of the ‘faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 1:3). This delivery is fundamentally God’s handing over of Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 8:31-32), ‘to share our existence and to affect our salvation.’ It is secondarily the human act of authoritatively delivering of the gospel to all people through the succeeding centuries. This secondary traditioning of the faith, this handing-on of the gospel in an authoritative and living way, is essential to the life of the Christian community.”

1.2.3 Grace

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.

(Eph 1:5-7 NIV)

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”^[1]

(Rm 4:4-8 NIV [Ps 32:1, 2])

The knowledge and understanding of grace ought to be a rudimentary principle in the Christian faith. Given (2001:322) confirms the primacy of the knowledge of grace in the Christian life,

“Grace is the single-most important element of the believer’s entire existence in Christ. Without the various manifestations of grace in the Christ-event, in the gift of the Spirit, and in judgment, humanity would be without hope.”

Grace in the Greek term, χάρις signifies “favour,” “goodwill,” and “loving kindness” – especially as granted by a superior to an inferior (see Bible Hub, 2016). It implies “sympathy” or “kindness” and with the sense of “for the sake of” or “out of consideration for” (Procksch *et al.*, 1985:1301). It thus implies that grace is associated with a non-meritocratic grant for the other. The grace of God is seen as God blessing, healing and delivering His people solely out of His liberality and gratuity. The grace of God is unearned, unmerited (Eph 2:8-9), and undeserved simply because of Jesus’ finished work at the cross, which legitimates and ultimately demonstrates grace for the undeserving. Grace, according to Paul himself, is granted not to the worthy but to the unworthy (Rm 5:7-8) – such is the abundance of Christ’s grace (2 Cor 4:15). Paul shows in Romans 4:4-8 an example of what grace does: If a labourer works for wages, it is because the labourer is bound by a master-servant relationship, a contract by which they agree upon a fixed amount of money as payment for worth of the labour done. The Bible speaks in economic terms, in that, we were debtors of Christ and that no amount of labour can redeem us from sin, so that Christ Himself paid what should have been due us, apart from our own labour – this, we call a gift, for it was given free, without any expectation of exchange, such is Christ’s grace.

In the New Testament, “grace” is mentioned 156 times, taking on a special redemptive sense, in which God makes available His favour on behalf of undeserving sinners. It is a gift from God – “generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved” (Grace *et al.*, 1990:437). Human beings are deeply tainted with sin committed in the Garden of Eden – the original sin – and thus, this sin have continuously flowed throughout humanity and all that is done by the sinful is tainted with that sin. Nothing of human doing may thus save the human person. The spoil of original sin has completely extinguished God’s trace in everyone’s souls such that no matter how righteously we conducted ourselves, our virtues could never make us worthy and will always fall short of the infinite holiness of God. Only the untainted may spare us from the spoils

of sin, but since all of us come from a single descent, all is tainted. It is therefore, merely by God's sovereign choice to extend His grace to us that salvation is possible at all.

Grace should not mean "cheap grace" – that which gives license to sin and is an alarming enemy of the church. Bonhoeffer (1959:43-45) describes cheap grace as that one "sold on the market like cheapjack wares in which the sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate". He continues by distinguishing the term from what he referred to as "costly grace" which is that "gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which humans knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ" (see also Workman, 2015).

A further discussion of grace and its components as according to the teachings of Calvin will be seen in the next chapters of this research.

1.3 Orientation

1.3.1 Background and motivation of the study

The theology of law and grace is, time and again, thrust into the limelight despite the volume of existing literature expounding on the same because despite the convenience of thoughts, the definitive extents of these precepts still beg for exposition. There have been numerous inquiries and chronicles on the matter, after all, whether treated separately or not, the understanding of law and grace are central to the Christian faith. For it is the law which exposed the fallibility of human beings to sin and it is grace (Rm 3:20) which allowed the sinner to enter the grand design of salvation (Eph 2:8), both playing an equivalent importance in the salvific narrative. Some treat the two as mutually exclusive in the soteriological sense (Choi, 2008:121) – the Old Testament being the embodiment of the law and the New Testament, that of grace. Some consider the Old Testament irrelevant in light of the New Testament where the remarkable life of

Jesus from the modesty of His upbringing up to the humility of His death were detailed, which is also an account of God showing His grace through His Son. On one end of the law-grace spectrum are the “legalists” who require strict obedience to the law upon which individuals are either approved or condemned (Burton, 1921:120), irrespective of their repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Reid *et al.*, 1990); on the other are the “antinomians,”⁴ who assert that the law is obsolete in light of Christ’s grace. In his book, *Antinomianism*, Jones (2013:x) elaborates on the antinomian principles:

With regard to justification, antinomians affirm that God never sees sin in believers; once we are in Christ, whatever our subsequent lapses, he sees at every moment only the flawless righteousness of the Saviour’s life on earth, now reckoned as ours. Then, with regard to sanctification ... the indwelling Christ is the personal subject who obeys the law in our identity once we invoke his help in obedience situations ... that the Holy Spirit within us directly prompts us to discern and do the will of God, without our needing to look to the law to either prescribe or monitor our performance ... those who live in Christ are wholly separated from every aspect of the pedagogy of the law. The freedom with which Christ has set us free, and the entire source of our on-going peace and assurance, are based upon our knowledge that what Christ enables us to do he actually does in us for himself. So now we live, not by being forgiven our constant shortcomings, but by being out of the law’s bailiwick altogether; not by imitating Christ, the archetypal practitioner of holy obedience to God’s law, but by burrowing ever deeper into the joy of our free justification, and of our knowledge that Christ himself actually does in us all that his and our Father wants us to do. Thus, the correlating of conscience with the Father’s coded commands and Christ’s own casuistry of compassion need not and indeed should not enter into the living of the Christian life.

While it may be conceded that to completely ignore the law is quite a risky standpoint as it would mean asserting that the law is powerless and insignificant, this belief of absolute and total justification by grace, apart from any human intervention, seem to be becoming an institution. Because of its sole reliance on grace and its abandonment of the power of the law, the thought was pejoratively named as the “hyper-grace” belief. Roys (2016) says that hyper-grace was is that recent movement in Christianity which places an extreme emphasis on the role of grace in salvation. “Hyper-grace teaches that God forgives one’s future sins the same way He forgives one’s past sins. Some even say that repentance and confession of sin are not necessary since Christians are eternally forgiven. Sin, according to some with a hyper-grace viewpoint, is bad only because it can be harmful to one’s life, and the only way to truly disappoint God is by not trusting His grace. The idea of progressive sanctification – that believers, with the help of the Holy Spirit, go through a process that gradually separates them from the evil of the world to be

⁴ The word comes from the Greek *anti* – against and *nomos* – law, and signifies opposition to law, *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*.

more and more like Christ – is dismissed by hyper-grace teachers as legalism. Instead, they believe that a holy life will be a by-product of God’s grace” (Roys, 2016).

In the law-grace spectrum, the churches are more likely scattered than they are cohesive, contrary to the ideal unity of the body of Christ. There are conflicting claims in the debate, one side would insist that salvation is by God’s grace alone, *Sola Gratia* (Latin, Glosbe Dictionary), in which justification and the resulting salvation are both solely brought about by the sovereign grace of God and not dependent on any action or condition contingent on human beings (Dickens, 1964:319; Rupp, 1966:171, 173). This is contradicted by the those who argue that adherence to grace alone inevitably leads to lawlessness as it allegedly will eventually lead to a mistaken notion of permission and license to sin (Scott, 2016:26; Brown, 2014:xi-xii). On the contrary, traditionalists find it hard to untangle themselves from the chains of the law in which obedience to it is adjudged to be the ultimate prerequisite to salvation, seemingly reducing the “grandeur of Christianity ... to the modest proportions of prudential ethics” (Abbey & Overton, 1878:1:32-33).

Hamel (2015) says, “I believe the Hyper-Grace message could be the end-time deception that will cause millions of people to fall away from God.” The question then is, how do we know when we are being deceived? Here is where the crux of Reformed theology or Calvinism cuts in. By systematically outlining what grace is through the TULIP, delineations have become more defined so that one can better identify how a certain perspective may come under the purview of hyper-grace so that when established as the standard for the understanding of grace, anything outside the TULIP can be said to be a hyper-grace perspective. Hence, the debate is no longer a dichotomy of law-grace but has become more dynamic in involving diverse factors in the debate. Proponents of these opposing perspectives contend the validity and truthfulness of their arguments in the growing debate on grace (Hamel, 2012; Haykin & Jones, 2011:17, 202).

Confusion is evident as word wars between preachers of the faith are exchanged in the platforms; preachers criticize another, apparently in the name of rectifying their skewed

theology. For example, Burton (2014) in his article “Joseph Prince, false-grace and the risk of millions falling away,” starkly criticizes Prince’s teachings on grace, labelling them as heresies. These bickering among preachers and theologians tend to cloud the faith of the growing Christian and the contrasting theologies tend to confuse and dismay the members of church who, in the search of a convenient theology hop from one church to another. Van Loon (2013) concludes that the tension in the church adversely affect those “church members with shallow, immature belief whose faith may fade when faced with a church split or disruption.”

In most traditional churches which have held on to the teaching that the strict obedience to the law is the way to absolution of sins, the incorporation of the doctrine of grace is introduced with much more caution. The idea of righteousness through faith in Christ alone (*Sola Fide*) independent of human works rings contrary to their institutionalized belief-system (TPS, 2014). Abandoning human effort to gain salvation is counter-intuitive especially to the members of highly traditional religious churches. These orthodoxies are now being radically challenged by what is now known as the Grace-Revolution – “a revolution of a relationship [in Christ] that is bringing believers into a deep, intimate relationship with the person of Jesus” (Prince, 2016). The Grace-revolution movement,⁵ which took dramatic turns through Joseph Prince (GRC, 2015), is, quite remarkably, making powerful inroads into the Christian churches in the face of opposition (Mattera, 2013). As contemporary theologian, Wilson (2013) writes, “I think it [the Grace-Revolution movement] holds theological water – on some counts it is almost indefensibly ridiculous – but because it is growing in popularity in charismatic circles, and more importantly, because it raises the interesting question of how we engage with and appraise new theological ideas when they emerge at a popular level.”

The pervading surge of the doctrine of grace in church communities has had a profound effect. While it has eased the spiritual burdens of many devotees who believed in the toiling of the body and soul to attain the blessings of salvation; on the other hand, and to a certain degree,

⁵ Prominent figures associated with the Grace-Revolution movement include Steve McVey, Rob Rufus, Paul Ellis, Joseph Prince, Andrew Wommack, John Crowder, Andre van der Merwe, Tullian Tchividjian, Andre Rabe, Andrew Farley, and Clark Whitten.

the doctrine of grace has also divided churches and turned believers against believers, sheep from their shepherds, and ministers from other ministers (Atherstone & Goddard, 2015:10) leading to church splits and the increase of church nomads. The surge of the Grace-revolution has also attracted critics and brought an influx of reproaches against its theology of grace (Fanning, 2009:7). Many sects and denominations resulted from the faction of the Christian churches over dogmatic tenets. The debate however, cannot be regarded as contemporary but rather archaic and has since been continuous, even succeeding a multi-sect following. The “Revolution” which we hear anew is not so new after all. Kowalski (2015) said that “Grace-revolution advocates claim that their teaching is an end-time message while critics see it as merely a fresh spin given to the rebellious, old heresy of antinomianism – disposed by Luther in the 16th century as a heresy, in which proponents in some manner negate or minimize any application of the obligatory nature of God’s moral law (and/or the implications of that obligation) for believers. Discourse on the grace doctrine revives back the teachings of the Reformation-era theologians, among which, Calvin and his teachings cannot be ignored as an authority in the matter.”

The mounting criticisms on the Calvinistic teaching on grace may be said to have stemmed from a profusion of multi-faceted thoughts fertile for research. Having witnessed the confusion and the protracted interpretation and understanding of grace, the researcher finds it perplexing that such confusion and clash could arise from such a fundamental yet rudimentary doctrine. Many contemporary beliefs and teachings have sprung up conforming to the Reformist perspective on grace and therefore have revived interest on Calvin’s theology. While modern-day Grace-revolutionists have revived anew an awareness and interest for Reformist teachings, they have also invited in a string of contemporary critics armed with novel perspectives on why they believe the tenets of the tradition are flawed apart from the earlier arguments thrown to Calvin during his time. It is but important to define where Calvinists stand in the current shape of the grace debate; hence the need to research – to answer why believers of the Christian faith, who ought to foster unity in the body, do not (cf. Del Colle, 2002:172-189; Putnam, Campbell & Garrett, 2012:495).

1.3.2 Existing relevant literature: status of research

A review of existing literature on the central question of the research was undertaken to set the pace for the study. The North West University Library Content Catalogue, JSTOR, NEXUS (the database of the NRF with current and completed research), SAePublications and ISAP (South African journal articles), EbscoHost (international journal articles), ProQuest (international theses and dissertations in full text), internet research facilities and other resource materials were consulted for relevant information and answers.

The following were the results of the preliminary review:

- Many teachings on the theology of grace by renowned theologians were published into scholarly works, books and articles. The materials talked about the significance of the doctrine of grace to the Christian narrative (Ryrie, 1975; Prince, 2007, 2010; Wommack, 2007; Tchividjian, 2010; Swindoll, 2009; Giovannetti, 2015);
- Owen's (2014:6-10) treatise on defending limited atonement (one of the five points of Calvinism) against critics, argue that the doctrine of universal redemption is unscriptural and destructive of the gospel (see also Haykin & Jones, 2011:124-135). There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, and more importantly, the teaching and preaching of the doctrine of grace (Packer, s.a.: par. 2). There is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead. This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the gospel message. To recover the authentic message of the gospel, and to bring our preaching and practice in line with the Bible, is perhaps our most pressing present need. It is at this point that Owen's treatise on redemption can provide us help (Packer, s.a.: par. 2);

- Essays and journal articles from the 21st century were published, featuring Reformed apologetics as a method of responding to criticisms and arguments directed toward the soteriological tenets of the Calvinistic/Reformed church (Leyrer, 2014; Korthals, 2013; Langebartels, 2016; Brug, 2015).

While there is no scarcity in literature pertaining to the grace doctrine from the perspectives of Calvinists and those held by different stakeholders – churches, scholars and theologians and orthodoxies; and while nearly of the same volume, there are multiple arguments for and against the definitions of grace and the interpretation of the texts written by the apostle Paul on the doctrine, there is a need, however, to clearly distinguish the Reformist corpus and to clearly identify it from contemporary offshoots on grace posing as an alternative of the latter. It is also necessary to clearly present the criticisms as well as the root sources, rationale and the logic explaining how the perspectives, understanding and arguments were constructed and established. Further analysis and investigation is needed to reveal the underlying explanations of why these criticisms arose and what the Reformist response are to these criticisms. The aim is to at least understand the critics and strive to have a clear, firm and true standing on a theologically diverse playing field, relying simply on the very source of revelation – the Bible.

In aid of clarifying the ambiguous propositions in the grace-debate and to contribute to existing literature, the researcher seeks to comparatively and conceptually analyse the different criticisms of Calvinistic theology perpetuated by theological misunderstanding and misconceptions passed on through social dynamics and tradition.

1.3.3 Problem statement

Grace is at the heart of Christianity. Machen (cited by Bufford, 2015:10) even said that it is the “very centre and core of the whole Bible.” It is the ultimate manifestation of the immense love of God, the very foundation of the gospel, profoundly shown to the sinner. Warfield (2000:44) said that “it is in almighty grace that a sinner can hope”. It has, once and for all, destroyed the interminable predicament of the human being – death, in its eventual sense that is.

Paul clearly says in Galatian 3:10-12 that anyone who believes that through the law, one is made righteous before God is under God's wrath and curse (Hendriksen, 1980:200). In Romans 3:28, we see where Paul stands, justification is by faith apart from the workings of the law, in the same way that righteousness is by faith (Rm 1:17, 3:27, 4:2, 4:5; Gl 2:16, 2:21, 15:6). Central to his concept is that those who were justified by faith in Christ are deemed inseparable to Christ (Rm 8:33-39). According to Furnish (1968:135) justification by faith is ultimately determinate to Paul's salvation-historical scheme. This same Christ-centeredness of Paul sparked a great debate (Dunn, 2007). His ideas seemed to have been refashioned to certain degrees so that his teachings were questioned during and after his lifetime. Paul's critics alleged that he was preaching an easier way to salvation or an abuse of God's goodness (Lebedev, 2004). Schechter (1961:5, 18) accuses Paul of preaching "cheap grace" and commented that Paul's teachings are "unintelligible," in so much as his (Paul's) teachings on grace push back against the traditional and religious understanding of what is fair and just and what people – sinners as we know, deserve.

"For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" the apostle Paul says (Rm 3:28 NIV). Paul suggests that righteousness is not earned by works nor by obeying the law but by purely believing that those of God are righteous through Jesus Christ who has paid for our sins and has redeemed sinners from the consequences of sin once and for all (Ac 10:43; Ac 13:38; 1 Jn 2:12; Eph 2:4-6). This revelation is revolutionary especially to law-locked traditional Christian churches. Case in point, the Philippines, with 81% of its population professing the Roman Catholic faith and ranking 5th in the world having the most Christian believers (PDI, 2011), has long been entrenched with the idea that obedience to the law leads to absolution of sins, after all, this is what traditional religion has been teaching. It is safe then to assume that the introduction of Calvinistic teachings of *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide* might not sit comfortably with traditional beliefs of orthodox churches given that obedience to the law has been an institutionalized doctrine in these churches. Whilst some are amenably accepting, a number of churches are still showing fervent resistance, if not to the whole concept, to certain provisions of the Reformist teachings on law and grace. Obviously, there is still confusion

among the Christian churches on the matter which may likely cause dissent in the church, much so, the separation of some members of the church from the faith (Lane, 2003).

The Christian church is constantly unsettled with questions of institutional differences across denominations in terms of the role of grace in the salvation narrative. Grace has apparently become a suspicious mystery. The challenge to defend Calvin's theology of grace is discernible. While there is a growing acknowledgment of the importance of the grace doctrine, with the same rigor, are those who argue against it. Hence, there is a pressing need to be knowledgeable on the source of the arguments thrown for or against the Calvinistic grace theology. While some may be doctrinal, some may be stemming from a personal or social force which might as well be addressed through a change in the social dynamics through a clarification of the narrative of the doctrine. The importance of knowing how to respond to arguments against the teaching is paramount. To strategically conceptualize a rightful response, one has to dig deep to the source of the cry. We must ask the 'why' and not just the 'what' – [what are arguments?] why are the Calvinistic teachings on grace being questioned? Is it just that it was misunderstood? Why was it misunderstood? Which provision is being questioned? What makes the provision unacceptable and to whom is it unacceptable to? What influenced their standpoints on the theological concept of grace? What is the response of the Calvinists on these attacks? What is the relationship between Calvin's teachings to that of Paul's? Why is there importance to know these? What is its relevance today?

The author's aim is not to determine the degree of truthfulness and/or veracity of every argument nor is it to weigh which side holds more water. The aim is not to determine a winner in the debate but rather to clearly and systematically present the debate itself so that the readers themselves can realize the relevance of Calvin and his teachings to Christianity and how the Reformist fathers influenced contemporary teachings. In the end, we may say that the study is to inquire to the gospel message of grace.

1.4 Central research question

In light of the preceding, the central research question of this study is thus:

How is the apologetics of the Calvinistic doctrine of grace relevant in contemporary Christianity?

The sub-questions arising from the central research question are the following:

1.4.1 What is Paul's theology of grace according to his epistles in the Bible?

1.4.2 What is the Calvinistic teaching on grace and how does it relate to the teachings of Paul?

1.4.3 What are the criticisms directed to the Calvinistic theology on grace and what are the respective rationale behind these criticisms?

1.4.4 What are the responses of Calvinism to the criticisms thrown at its teaching on the grace?

1.4.5 What is the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity?

1.5 Aim and objective

1.5.1 Aim

This paper presents the arguments against and the counter-arguments for the Calvinistic concept of grace and discusses the significance of Calvin's theology of grace and the Reformed apologetics in contemporary Christianity.

By answering the research questions, the study aims to present the response of the Calvinists on the arguments against Reformed theology of grace and to discuss the relevance of the same in contemporary Christianity. It will provide readers a realization of the current situation of the Calvinism in terms of its standing on the grace debate as told by theologians and writers of the faith.

1.5.2 Objective

Considering the foregoing aim and research problem statements, the specific objectives of the study are the following:

- 1.5.2.1 To concisely characterize Paul's teachings on grace as according to his epistle to the Ephesians (supported by biblical passages);
- 1.5.2.2 To discuss the Calvinistic teaching of grace and to determine its relationship with the teachings of Paul;
- 1.5.2.3 To identify the criticisms directed to the Calvinistic teachings on grace and to study their respective grounding arguments and rationale;
- 1.5.2.4 To comprehensively and clearly present the response of Calvinism to the criticisms thrown at its teaching on grace through Reformed apologetics; and,
- 1.5.2.5 To discuss the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity.

1.6 Central theoretical argument

The study of the defence of Calvinism in the grace-debate results to the realization of contemporary Christians to exegete carefully, examine teachings accurately and deal with new theological ideas cautiously; that Scripture is the ultimate source of defence against critics and that the works of the Reformist fathers are essential to understand Scripture.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Research design and research approach

This study was approached from the Reformed tradition. In principle, this study relies heavily on the Bible as a normative basis.

The defences of the Calvinistic thought on grace are analysed using Reformed apologetics.

To answer the questions of the research, the following methodologies were applied:

1.7.1.1 *Biblical exegesis*

The researcher studied Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, more particularly Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9, through biblical exegesis⁶ using the Historical-grammatical method,⁷ which is used to determine Scriptural meaning in its own setting and culture and “to make meaningful that message to the lives of the interpreter and those to whom propounds the message” (Mare, 1973:1). This method undergoes a general three-fold approach to the text in subject. The first step of observation involves an examination of words, structure, structural relationships and literary forms. The second step is interpretation which involves asking questions, formulating answers to those questions, integration and summarization of the passages. The third step is application which comprises determination of both the theoretical and practical significance of the text, and appropriately applying this significance to today’s modern context. There is also a heavy emphasis on personal application that extends into all aspects of the practitioner’s life (Hendricks, 1991:349).

1.7.1.2 *Review of existing relevant literature using the hermeneutic cycle*

Using the hermeneutic cycle, the researcher studied relevant texts in connection to other texts. Each text is seen through the bigger picture. Understanding the succeeding relevant literature is influenced by each new paper read. There is a movement back and forth between the parts and the whole in the process of understanding. Understanding of the meaning and importance of individual texts depend on the understanding of the whole body of relevant literature which in turn is built up through the understanding of individual texts (cf. Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010:133).

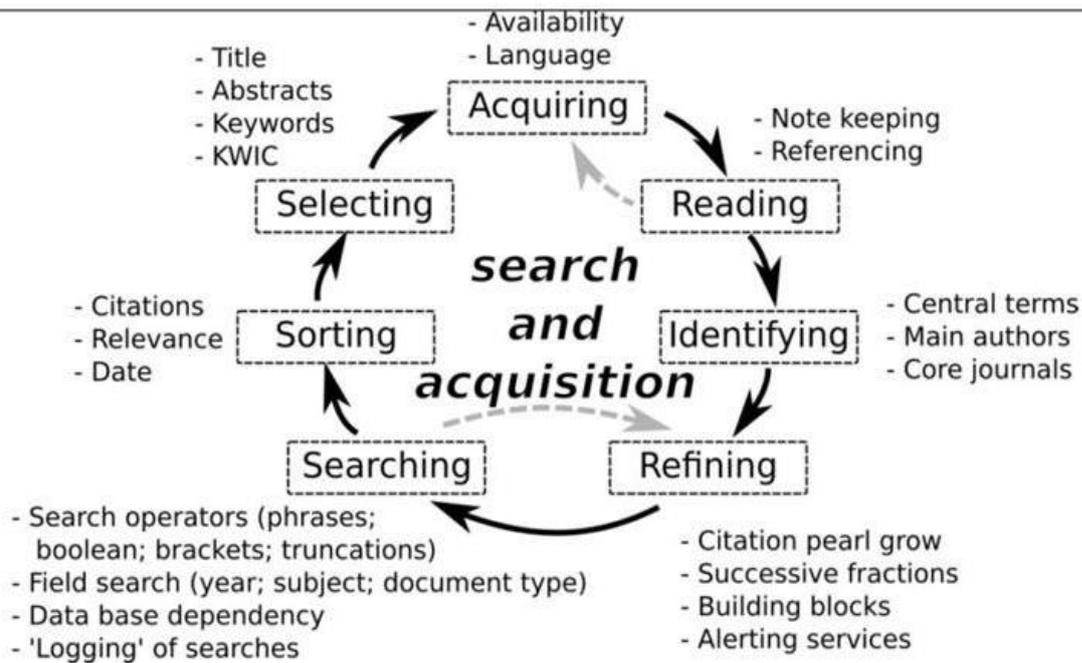
The illustration shows the hermeneutical cycle (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010:135):

Figure 1

The hermeneutic circle and techniques associated with different stages

⁶ See Young *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* 10.

⁷ See Terry *Biblical Hermeneutics* 205.



1.7.1.3 *Reformed apologetics*

This method was adopted in discussing the defence threaded by Calvinists in their counter-response to the criticisms against Calvin's theology of grace.

1.7.1.4 *Comparative analysis*

This method was applied to systematically present a comparison of the Calvinistic doctrine of grace to that of other theologies of grace (cf. Walk, 1998:1-2).

The purpose of the research design is to enhance the confidence of the results of this study without suffering from limitations associated with only one method or from the specific application of just one.

The purpose of the study is not to validate the supremacy of the Calvinistic perspectives as opposed to its critics nor is it to form a hierarchy on the theology of grace but rather to systematically present a picture of the grace debate, to present the defence of Calvinists against criticisms through the Reformed apologetics in light of Paul's teachings and therefore to draw a conclusion as to the relevance of the debate in contemporary Christianity.

1.7.2 Ethical considerations

This study complied with the ethical requirements of the Department of Higher Education and the North West University, as far as literature study is concerned. The risk level as far as ethical implications are concerned, is minimal.

In summary, the following were administered:

- a. To concisely characterize Paul's teachings on grace and its role for salvation, redemption, and Christian living and to discuss the extents thereof, the researcher studied Pauline epistles relevant to the topic, more particularly Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9 through biblical exegesis using the Historical-Grammatical method, which strives to determine Paul's original intended meaning in the text. A review of existing relevant literature was also undertaken to expound on the subject matter;
- b. To discuss the Calvinistic teaching on grace and to determine its relationship with the teachings of Paul, a review of existing relevant literatures using the hermeneutics cycle and a comparative analysis on the theologies of grace were undertaken;
- c. To identify the criticisms against the Calvinistic teachings on grace and to study their respective arguments a review of existing relevant literatures using the hermeneutic cycle was conscientiously undertaken. The researcher also comparatively analysed the criticisms with that of the Calvinistic perspectives;
- d. To comprehensively and clearly present the response of Calvinism and/or its theologians to the criticisms thrown at its teaching on grace and its role for salvation, redemption, and Christian living, the researcher conducted a review of existing relevant literatures through the Reformed apologetics; and,
- e. To discuss the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity, the researcher conducted an extensive review of existing relevant literatures and a laconic evaluation of the current situation of the subject matter aided by the writings of theologians.

1.8 Proposed chapter outline

This research paper is strategically apportioned topically to cover the problem statements.

To wit:

Chapter 1: research introduction

Includes the background of the study, research problem statement and the research methodology.

Chapter 2: Pauline grace

Paul's characterization of Christ's grace as according to his epistles in the Bible particularly in the book of Ephesians 1:5-7, 2:8-9 and the role of grace in the salvation and redemption of human beings, and in Christian living.

Objective: to characterize Paul's teachings on grace.

Chapter 3: Calvin on grace: the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of sinners

This chapter focuses on the Calvinistic teaching on the soteriological concepts of grace and its role in the forgiveness of sin leading to the salvation of human beings, as summarized by the "TULIP". This chapter also includes the perspectives of Calvinistic theologians on the topic and a comparative analysis of Calvin's theology of grace to that of other theologies.

Objective: to discuss the Calvinistic teaching on grace and to determine its relationship with the teachings of others on grace.

Chapter 4: the grace debate

This chapter presents the significant the significant arguments of those criticizing teachings of Calvinism on grace and its role in the forgiveness of sin leading to the salvation of human beings. This chapter also includes the respective arguments of the criticisms against the Calvinistic theology of grace.

Objective: to identify the criticisms or attacks directed against the Calvinistic teaching on grace and to study their respective grounding arguments or rationale.

Chapter 5: in defence of Calvin

This chapter includes the counter-defence and the response of Calvin and Calvinist theologians against the critics of the Reformed teaching on the role of grace in the forgiveness of sin and in the salvation of human beings.

Objective: to comprehensively and clearly present the response of Calvinism to the criticisms thrown against its teaching on grace, through Reformed apologetics.

Chapter 6: the relevance of Calvin and the grace debate in contemporary Christianity

This final chapter focuses on the influence of Calvin’s teaching on grace and the impact of the grace debate in contemporary Christianity. This chapter briefly encapsulated the feats of Calvinism, the current situation it is in and the challenges it is currently facing as well as the challenges ahead.

Objective: to discuss the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity.

1.9 Schematic presentation

Table 1

Schematic presentation of the research method

Reformed Apologetics on the Calvinistic doctrine of grace: Calvinists response to the critics		
Central research question: how is the apologetics of the Calvinistic teaching of grace relevant in contemporary Christianity?		
1.4 Research questions	1.5.2 Objectives	1.7 Research methodologies

<p>1.4.1 What is Paul's theology of grace according to his epistles in the Bible?</p>	<p>1.5.2.1 To concisely characterize Paul's teachings.</p>	<p>The researcher studied the Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, more particularly Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9 through biblical exegesis using the Historical-grammatical method, which strives to determine Paul's original intended meaning in the text. A review of existing relevant literature was also undertaken to expound on the subject matter;</p>
<p>1.4.2 What is the Calvinistic teaching on grace and what is its relationship with the teachings of Paul and of others on grace?</p>	<p>1.5.2.2 To discuss the Calvinistic teaching on grace and to determine its relationship to the teachings of Paul and of others on grace.</p>	<p>A review of existing relevant literature using the hermeneutics cycle and a comparative analysis on the teachings of Calvin on grace and Paul's as well as others, was undertaken.</p>
<p>1.4.3 What are the attacks against the Calvinistic theology on grace and what are the respective grounding arguments or rationale behind these criticisms?</p>	<p>1.5.2.3 To identify the criticisms directed to the Calvinistic teachings on grace and to study their respective arguments.</p>	<p>A review of existing relevant literature using the hermeneutics cycle was undertaken. The researcher also comparatively analysed the rationale of the criticisms and that of the Calvinistic perspective on the subject matter.</p>
<p>1.4.4 What are the responses of Calvinism to the criticisms thrown against its teaching on grace?</p>	<p>1.5.2.4 To comprehensively and clearly present the response of Calvinism to the criticisms thrown against its teaching on grace using the Reformed apologetics.</p>	<p>The researcher conducted a review of existing relevant literature.</p>

1.4.5 What is the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity?	1.5.2.5 To discuss the relevance of the Calvinistic teaching on grace in contemporary Christianity.	The researcher conducted a review of existing relevant literature and a laconic evaluation of the current situation of the church with regard the grace teaching, aided by the writings of contemporary theologians.
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1.10 Conclusion

Although Paul explicitly presented the doctrine of God’s grace in his writings in the Scripture, evidently, the church is starkly divided into as many different interpretations and convictions as there are on the issue of God’s grace and its extents in the salvation narrative. The scope of God’s grace in the human life and salvation has been divisive as can be seen in Christian history where debates and controversies arose qualifying God’s sovereignty over human will or the inverse idea. Fundamental to these clashes, we must ask whether the beliefs and perspectives forwarded align with the Scripture, otherwise, whichever faith doctrine should fail to follow the Scripture must be questioned. The Bible should be the litmus test in judging these faith-debates. The succeeding chapters will present Paul’s teachings on grace and the Reformed perspectives on the subject matter. Thereafter, we shall be looking into the relevant questions tossed against the Reformist fathers and those which are still asked today. With the Scripture, buffered by the teachings of the Reformist fathers, as bases, this paper presents the defences of Reformed tradition on the doctrine of grace. More importantly, this paper addresses the relevance of the Reformed perspectives on grace in contemporary Christianity.

CHAPTER 2

PAULINE GRACE

2.1 Introduction

The conviction that the Bible is inspired by and is the word of God is fundamental for a grounded Christian life. Calvin⁸ says that the reason why we need to be sure of the Scripture is not so that we can theorize or discuss theological conjectures but to render the basis for trusting God and therefore, to “banish all doubt.” The authors of the Bible were God-inspired and Spirit-filled writers. God called His writers and allowed them to see His wonders and hear His voice so that in His governance they may pen the chronology of God’s works in the sinners’ lives. Hence, apart from divine guidance, the Bible would have never come into existence. The second epistle of Paul to Timothy 3:16 is witness to this truth, “All Scripture is God-breathed.” Metzger and Coogan (1993:302-304) said, “With regard to the Bible, inspiration denotes the doctrine that the authors and editors of canonical scripture were led or influenced by the Deity with the result that their writings are designated as the word of God.” Calvin was more radical in his view – not only did he view the Bible as God-inspired; he treated it as an utterance of God Himself from heaven. In his commentary to the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, Calvin (1856:248-249) said:

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others that we know that God hath spoken to us and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let them first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the law and the prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of human beings, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

While the general rule in literature entails that texts are commonly susceptible to multiple streams of meanings from multifarious sources, it may be positively concluded that texts however, have only one intended meaning – that one intended by the author. In approaching Scriptural study, Paul advises believers in his second epistle to Timothy 2:15 to “correctly handle the Word of truth”. This means that interpreters of the Bible ought to refer to the author of Scripture and avoid any integration, whether unconscious or conscious, of the readers’

⁸ Inst 1:6:3.

subjective colourings of what they personally think, with the actual message of Scriptural passages, hence the need for accurate hermeneutics. In order to stay true to Paul's advice, readers should know who the author of the Scripture is and what the Scripture is for. The conviction that the Bible is "the Word of God" and that it reveals the thoughts of God serves as a conceptual umbrella guiding the readers in understanding passages in the Scripture. This mind-set is important in this study as it conditions the reader regarding the approach taken to explain concepts in this paper.

If the Bible is believed to be authored by God, shall we then say that it is free from errors and absolute in its truth? Is it inerrant and flawless? Young (1957:113) describes Scriptural inerrancy – "the Scripture possesses the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth." Calvin also (1856:249) believed that the Bible told the truth. In his writings, Nicole (1982:430-431) wrote of Calvin's conviction on the inerrancy of the Bible. This can be construed from Calvin's writings. In his commentary on the book of Matthew, Calvin⁹ stressed that we "will be safe from the danger of erring" so long as we "inquire from the Scriptures [of] what is right and true." He further contended that the biblical writers are "organs of the Holy Spirit" and therefore declared and wrote as the Spirit led them. Because Calvin¹⁰ professed that the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, its authorship then has nothing pertaining to human intellect and "savours of nothing earthly"¹¹ and is therefore perfect, unified and well-ordained. Geisler and Roach (2012:90) too supported this view, that the Scripture is wholly God-given, "without error or fault in its teaching ... in its witness to God's grace in individual lives" (see also Boice, 1979:13). Reformists thus came to view the Bible as "infallible, authoritative, sufficient, unified, necessary, useful, and singular in truth and power" (Hiebert, 2016; Metzger & Coogan, 1993:302-304). Such view affected how Reformists interpreted and understood the Scripture (Kaiser Jr & Silva, 2009:107).

⁹ Comm on 2 Tm 3:16.

¹⁰ Inst 1:9:2.

¹¹ See Inst 1:8:1.

Essentially, Reformists read the Bible from a redemptive-historical perspective in which the Bible is seen as a “self-revelation of God” (Vos, 2003:5-9). Calvin’s writings hinged on the notion that the Bible is a means for human beings to have knowledge of God.¹² Calvin clarified that the point is not that we should know the Scripture, but that we should, through the Scripture, know God. Gaffin (2012:91) explains that the Scripture is an account of “inexorable forward movement of history, in all of its twists and turns, toward its intended goal, Christ.” Through the Redemptive-historical view, readers of the Bible are urged to maintain a hermeneutic that has as its goal to trace every passage to its ultimate reference point: the cross of Christ, a story of how God is, through Christ, redeeming people unto Himself.

The conviction that the Bible is the Word of God through which He reveals Himself to us, serves as a conceptual umbrella guiding the readers in understanding passages, especially in points that refer to contentious doctrines. In the study of God’s grace, by accepting the truthfulness and veracity of the Scripture, we begin to delve into the doctrine which God had authored, and we confidently allow such revelations to transform us in accordance to Scripture. This chapter will explore how God presented His grace to the readers of His word through the writings of Paul in light of the Redemptive-historical perspective.¹³

2.2 Paul the apostle of grace

Paul¹⁴ is undeniably one of the greatest Christian figures (Becker, 1993:1, 5), apart from Christ Himself. He was known as the apostle to the Gentiles because he himself was a Gentile. Paul was a Roman¹⁵ citizen (Ac 22:25-29). He introduced the God of the Jews to the Gentiles and

¹² This thought was the theme of his second book of the *Institutes*, of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the fathers, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel, see Inst 1:6.

¹³ A perspective usually affiliated to the Reformists, which explained that the Scripture is a progressive anthology of the revelation of Christ and His work in the salvation narrative. Thus, the Bible is seen to have its pinnacle towards Christ, see Gaffin 2012 *Biblical Hermeneutics* 89-110; Vos *Biblical Theology* 5-9.

¹⁴ After his conversion, he preferred to be called in his Roman name Paul rather than his Hebrew name, Saul.

¹⁵ In Paul’s time, being a Roman citizen entails that one is privileged: “To the Roman his citizenship was his passport in distant lands, his talisman in seasons of difficulties and danger; it shielded him alike

drew the Gentiles into a relationship with God. Paul himself acknowledged the responsibility to introduce God to the Gentiles as something levied to him. He emphasized this in his writings:

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

(Col 1:27 NIV)

And for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

(1 Tim 2:7 NIV)

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

(Rm 1:5 NIV)

Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.

(Rm 15:15-18 NIV)

Much of Paul's formative years have had an influence on his ability to preach the gospel to the world. He was educated under Gamaliel who is known to be one of the most prominent scholars at that time (Ac 22:3). Paul also spoke many languages – Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek and possibly Latin. He lived in the cosmopolitan city Tarsus, which was known as the melting-pot of cultures. These background plots shaped Paul to be, in effect, a citizen of the world. He was a philosopher, an analyst of Scripture, a prolific writer and a persuasive preacher (Ac 25-25). Paul was a member of the strictest Jewish sect, he was a Pharisee whose zeal oppressed those who believed in Christ (Ac 26:10-11; Gl 1:13-14). Although Paul persecuted the body of Christ, God had greater plans for him. God turned Paul around. On his way to Damascus to yet again arrest Christians for inquest and execution (Ac 9:2), Paul narrates in Acts (9:3-9) his first encounter with Christ which led to his conversion. Paul's conversion in spite of his attempt to persecute Christ's people, demonstrated divine grace. Indeed, God may use everyone, even the hostile persecutor, to achieve divine purpose (Hiesberger, 2007:341). No fall is too deep that grace

from the caprice of municipal law and the injustice of local magistrates," see The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia *Paul the Apostle* 2273.

cannot descend to it (Lange, 1868:24). This turn of events radically sparked in Paul a zealotry to preach God's grace.

Although Paul was not the only one who taught about God's grace in the Bible, it was he whom God chose to administer His works and grace (Eph 3:2) because Paul himself had a first-hand revelation from God to testify and preach it to the Gentiles (Ac 20:24; 1 Cor 15:1-4). God revealed His grace to Paul when, while Paul was still called Saul, a persecutor of His followers, Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus and called him to be an apostle of His grace (see Ac 9:3-17). Thus, Paul dedicated his ministry to preaching God's grace and went on to write his reformed life and the message impressed in him in as many as 14 epistles which were included in the Bible.

2.3 The crisis in Paul's writings on grace

The Christian dogma of God's grace has arguably been the topic of most debates in Christianity. Ryrie (1963:10-11) wrote that grace is "the watershed that divides Catholicism from Protestantism, Calvinism from Arminianism, and modern theological liberalism from theological conservatism." Out of which arose the variety of theologies on the salvation of sinners. While it has been plainly and generally characterized as "a gift from God freely given" for the salvation of human beings (Kainer, 2015:1, 7-12), this definition, however has faced many criticisms from both within and outside Christianity. Robichaux (2000:5) observed that there is a "wide spectrum of definitions of what grace is among various faith traditions within the Christian church." Yarchin (2004:xi) compared the diversity of the interpretation of the Bible to a shelf full of religious books saying different things but all claiming to be faithful interpretations of the Bible. Gaffin (2006:10) points out that there is an "undeniable state of affairs: the problematic nature of Pauline interpretation that has proven to be the case down through the history of the church to the present." Various authors, theologians and scholars have weighed in on the doctrine of grace accruing from the biblical texts written by Paul. After all, Paul is known as the apostle of grace.

Despite having Paul's writings in the Bible as the main source for the explanation of the doctrine of grace, there seem to be an inundation of diverse scholarly outputs on what grace is all about and what its effects are to sin and its role in the salvation of the sinner.¹⁶ Instead of clarity, the numerous writings seem to complex its meaning and implications. Peter writes the susceptibility of misunderstanding Paul, "He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pt 3:16 NIV).

Slick (2016) observes the growing number of contemporary preachers relying on fresh revelation of the Scripture, as opposed to looking back to the origin of the doctrine as already revealed by the apostle Paul. Gaffin (2006:1) reaffirms this observation and warns believers to take caution in receiving these "new revelations," he said,

The study of Paul is currently dominated by the so-called 'new perspective on Paul,' the substantial reassessment of his theology that has emerged over the past several decades. Generalizations about this new perspective need to be made with some caution. They are notoriously difficult, since the designation covers a spectrum of viewpoints that often diverge, sometimes even widely.

To understand Paul's thoughts on grace, Gaffin (2006:6) proposes a way of understanding Paul through the Redemptive-historical perspective:

A biblical-theological approach must always be done with the recognition that each writer is part of a much larger scenario, a much larger historical scenario. Each, with his distinctive contribution, functions in the unfolding history of God's self-revelation. God's verbal self-revelation has its rationale as it is tethered to and is a part within the larger totality of the overall history of redemption and accompanying verbal revelation, of attesting and interpreting revelatory word focused on redemptive deed.

The Holy Bible is the only and final authority for any doctrine the church has to teach and the only written revelation of God to humanity. The Scripture speaks for itself (Frame, 1973:178-181). It has its own interpretation (Miller, 2003:153). This means that the clearer parts of the Scripture are used to interpret the less clear provisions of the Scripture. This principle places control over meanings and confines the sense of any text to that which fits with the rest of the Scripture. The meaning of any part of the Bible must be understood in the context of the Bible

¹⁶ Some works include Sanders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* i; Chester *Reading Paul with the Reformers* 322; Stuhlmacher *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification* 75; Campbell *Deliverance of God* 172; Dunn *Theology of Paul the Apostle* 335; Wright *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* 1320; and Barclay *Paul and the Gift* 151.

as a whole (Baker, 1980:21). In this way we follow the lead of the New Testament writers who understood the texts of the Bible in their redemptive-historical setting (McCartney, 2003), who related them to the ultimate biblical goal of fulfilment in Christ.

There is no space for subjective interference and personal colourings in proper biblical interpretation. Vos (2014:997) says, “Revelation as an act of God, theistically conceived of, can in no wise be associated with anything imperfect or impure or below the standard of absolute truth.” No permission is given to the reader to be guided by personal considerations. The reader ought to be guided by the pronouncement of the Scripture itself. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:478-479) warn that those who pursue scenarios that are not supported by the Scripture “engage in pure speculation and does not therefore bear authority,” thus the Reformed principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). To understand grace, readers ultimately ought to refer to Paul’s characterization of its role in salvation, redemption, and in Christian living in light of the revelations of Scripture.

By studying Paul’s writings on what grace is (particularly Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9), as supported by the rest of the Scripture, the researcher hopes to contribute clarity to the clutter.

2.4 Grace in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians

According to Arnold (2008:21), Ephesians best narrates what it means to be a Christian because it shows the “heart of the Christian faith.” Wellman (2015) points that the most pronounced purpose why Paul wrote Ephesians was to relay that it is “by grace that we have been saved through faith and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Although Paul wrote of God’s grace in his other epistles such as in Romans (i.e., Rm 3:24-26, 4:15-16, 5:1-2, 21, 6:14, 23, 11:6) and Galatians, it is in Ephesians where Paul best articulated God’s gift of grace to the sinners. After all, it is in Ephesians 3:2 where Paul tells us about the administration of God’s grace which was given to him. Scholars agree that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was one of his more meaningful works. Bruce (1984:229) calls Ephesians “the quintessence of Paulinism” because it, “in large

measure, sums up the leading themes of the Pauline epistles, and at the same time the central motive of Paul's ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles." Robinson (1907:vii) and Dodd (1929:1224-1225) called it the "crown of St. Paul's writings" and the "crown of Paulinism" respectively. Coleridge (1858:82) wrote that Ephesians is "one of the divinest compositions of man, it embraces every doctrine of Christianity." Calvin (cited by Kostenberger *et al.*, 2012:241) even referred to it as his favourite epistle. This letter of Paul to the Ephesians has, undeniably, immensely influenced Christian thought. Paul's writings on grace have been underscored in his letter to the church in Ephesians. It is for these reasons that we delve into the study of this letter and find here Paul's thoughts on grace, so that we are able to associate his writings with what the other passages in the Bible has to say about God's grace in light of the works of Christ.

2.4.1 Historical context of Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9

2.4.1.1 Authorship

Arnold (2008:22, 46) mentioned that the authorship of Ephesians is one of most debated issues in the critical scholarship of the letter.¹⁷ Few evangelical scholars doubt the authenticity of the letter as well as its authorship. Two conflicting positions among scholars were hypothesized: (1) that Paul himself wrote the letter; and, (2) that Ephesians is "pseudonymous," written only in Paul's name by a loyal disciple, after the apostle's death (see Barth, 1974:50-51; Perrin, 1982:218-222). There are notable exceptions such as Dunn (1998:39) and Lincoln (1990:xl-lxxiii), but the vast majority of prominent evangelical scholars, who have written substantial commentaries and journal articles on Ephesians, are convinced of Paul's authorship of Ephesians. These include such scholars as Hoehner (2002:2-77), O'Brien (1979:504-516), Heil (2007:4-6), Carson and Moo (2009:479-497), and Schreiner (2011:11-30), among others. Although some critical scholars may accuse evangelicals of a confessional bias when it comes to this issue, such a charge represents a cavalier dismissal of the substantial amount of evidence convincing many to strongly favour Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

¹⁷ For the most recent substantive defence of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, see the sixty-page treatment in Hoehner *Ephesians* 2-61.

Arnold (2011:46-50) summarized the key reasons why scholars and commentators are convinced that Ephesians is an authentic Pauline letter:

- (1) The pseudepigraphical hypothesis;
- (2) There is early attestation of Paul as the author of Ephesians;
- (3) The theological emphases are appropriate to a life setting in first-century Ephesus and Western Asia Minor;
- (4) The alleged “differences” between the theology of Ephesians and the theology of Paul are better explained as distinct emphases within his thought rather than as contradictions that the historical Paul could not have expressed;
- (5) Paul was capable of writing with a range of styles exhibiting his own literary flair;
- (6) The hypothesis that the author of Ephesians used Colossians as a literary source is not persuasive; and,
- (7) The evidence from Judaism and early church history casts doubt over the acceptability of pseudepigraphical letter writing in Christian circles.¹⁸

2.4.1.2 *Context and audience of the letters to the Ephesians*

Slater (2012:11) pointed out three main positions concerning the context and rationale of the writing of Ephesians. The first is that Paul wrote Ephesians to a mixed congregation which included both Jews and non-Jews in order to affirm the connection with Judaism and to encourage the congregation to overcome ethnic tensions and live in harmony. The second is that Ephesians is a general letter written for a predominantly Gentile congregation. Its purpose was to serve as an introductory letter for the collection of Paul’s letters. The Jewish Christian-Gentile tensions are no longer relevant in this predominantly Gentile congregation. The third position argues that Ephesians is not a general letter and it was written by Paul to new converts to explain to them their connection to Judaism.

If Paul was the author of the letter (which we assume he is), then it was most probably written from Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment (vv. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20), and probably soon after his arrival there, four years after he had parted with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Bible.org; see also Robinson, 1910:181-189). However, scholars who dispute Paul’s authorship, date the letter between AD, 70–80 (Barth, 1974:50-51). The possible location of the authorship could have been within the church of Ephesus itself.

¹⁸ For the elaboration of these key reasons, one should consult Kittredge *Community and Authority* 111-148.

According to Berkhof (1996:452), the major theme of the letter is the unity and reconciliation of the whole of creation through the agency of the church and, in particular, its foundation in Christ as part of the will of the Father. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul writes from the point of view of the demonstration of the righteousness of God – His covenant of faithfulness and saving grace in the gospel; the author of Ephesians writes from the perspective of union with Christ, who is the head of the true church.

2.4.1.3 *An overview of Ephesians*

Doty (2014:34) divides Paul's letter into three parts: instruction (vv. 1:3-3:21), *paraenesis*¹⁹ (vv. 4:1-6:20), and commendation (vv. 6:21-22). With regard to instructions (vv. 1:3-3:21), since the eulogy contains instructions concerning God's eternal purpose and plan. Hoehner (2002:73) summarizes the flow of Ephesians and posits that it is best to accept that the body of the letter begins with the eulogy in Ephesians 1:3-14, followed by the thanksgiving and prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. After the thanksgiving, Paul continues and provides the background context of the letter reiterating the sinfulness of human beings who deserve God's wrath but have instead become the subject of God's grace (vv. 2:1-10). He continues by informing the believers at Ephesus that redeemed sinners form a corporate unity; that the Jewish and Gentile believers now belong to one new community – the church (vv. 3:1-13). He then prays for the Ephesians, that they might know Christ's love and exhibit that love towards one another. Paul hopes that this may be experienced in the Ephesian believers' lives (vv. 3:14-19). Paul ends this instructional section with a doxology (vv. 3:20-21).

The second part of the letter's body is the *paraenesis* (vv. 4:1-6:20), beginning with the words παρακαλώ οὖν ὑμᾶς – "I exhort you," in Ephesians 4:1, having just completed the prayer for the believers to be strengthened with Christ's love (vv. 3:14-19), it further emphasizes the need for believers to demonstrate love for one another (Bjerkelund, 1967:15-19, 179-187). Other Pauline

¹⁹ The word *paraenesis* or *parenesis* transliterates the Greek *parainēsis*, which originally meant any kind of advice, instruction, or counsel; *paraenesis* is a literary genre for a string of loosely connected ethical imperatives, *Oxford Bibliographies*.

literature such as the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians substantiates the idea that prayer and *paraenesis* are compatible principles (Best, 1972:6-112; Doty, 2014:32, 34; Moule & Lincoln, 1982:43). Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to live harmoniously within their own church community as well as with those outside their fellowship. He reaffirms this exhortation by the repetition of περιπατέω – “walk and conduct” in Ephesians 4:1, 17, 5:2, 8, 15. Ephesians 6:10-11 reveals the necessity of the Lord’s strength in order to be able to stand against the schemes of the devil that hinder the Christian’s righteous walk with God. Hoehner (2002:74) writes that Ephesians is a letter very similar to other Pauline letters in terms of sequence, following instruction and prayer and a *paraenetic* section.

The third part of Paul’s letters usually included a concluding section, which may incorporate an autobiographical element, an announcement of Paul’s visit, or an identification and recommendation of Paul’s messenger (White, 1971:91-97). In Ephesians 6:21-22, Paul identifies and recommends his messenger Tychicus who is to relay to them how Paul was doing. These elements are analogous to his other letters (Rm 16:1-2; 1 Cor 16:10-12, 15-18; Col 4:7-9; see also 2 Cor 8:16-24; Phlp 2:19-30).

2.4.1.4 *Literary structure*

According to Hoehner (2002:61-62), Ephesians is similar to other Pauline letters, it is divided into two main parts: doctrine (chap. 1-3) and duties or ethics (chap. 4-6).²⁰ After the prologue (vv. 1:1-2), the first portion offers extended praise directed to God for all the spiritual benefits given to those who are in Christ (vv. 1:3-14), which is followed immediately by a commendation to the readers for their faith and love, and a petition for wisdom and revelation (vv. 1:15-23). The readers are reminded of their relationship with God before and after conversion (vv. 2:1-10) and the new union of Jewish and Gentile believers who are now considered one through the church (vv. 2:11-22). Consequently, there is not only reconciliation of human beings to God but also between Jewish and Gentile believers. Having explained this, Paul describes the mystery of the

²⁰ The summary provided here is drawn mostly from Hoehner, *Ephesians* 62-64.

union of the Jew and Gentile believers in Christ, and his ministry in dispensing this mystery to the Gentiles (vv. 3:1-13). He concludes the first portion of the letter by praying that the Ephesian believers be strengthened in love so that the union of Jewish and Gentile believers might be carried out in God's power (vv. 3:14-21).

The second portion is the application, or *paraenesis*, showing how the doctrine translates into the conduct of the believers. This portion is subdivided into six sections, governed by the imperative περιπατέω (walk) which is used five times in conjunction with the inferential conjunction οὖν (therefore). They are: (1) to walk in unity (vv. 4:1-16); (2) to walk in holiness and not as the Gentiles (vv. 4:17-32); (3) to walk in love by imitating God and abstaining from evil practices (vv. 5:1-6); (4) to walk in light by not becoming involved with the evildoers and their works (vv. 5:7-14); and (5) to walk in wisdom by being controlled by the Holy Spirit in their domestic and public life (vv. 5:15-6:9). The sixth section begins with the articular adjective τό λοιπόν – “finally,” to indicate that this is the final thing he wants to say before he ends the epistle. Here Paul enjoins the believers to stand against evil (vv. 6:10-20), (Hoehner, 2002:62). A short conclusion closes the epistle (vv. 6:21-24).²¹

Paul writes that the people of the Ephesians were walking in trespasses and sins (v. 2:1-2) and they are exhorted not to walk as the Gentiles in the futility of their minds (v. 4:17). A believer is to walk in the good works which God has prepared beforehand (v. 2:10). The elaboration of this is seen in the exhortation to walk worthy of one's calling (v. 4:1). Love is a very prominent theme in both sections: God chose the believers that they might be holy and blameless in love (v. 1:4); Paul praises God for the grace bestowed on believers in the beloved one, Christ (v. 1:6); Paul commends the Ephesian believers' love for one another (v. 1:15); God exhibits His rich mercy through the great love by which He loved the believers (v. 2:4); and because the believers have been rooted and grounded in [God's] love (v. 3:17), Paul prays that they might be able to

²¹ Regarding the division of Ephesians, Cameron looks not at the content but analyses its linguistic structure: he observes that there are eight parallel panels, he excludes 6:18-22, that are chiasmic in structure though he labels them as *palistrophe*, see Camero *Structure of Ephesians* 3-17. Such intricate and subtle patterns seem unlikely for any writer of a letter. Interestingly, the divisions of the epistle are similar to others who derive their structure from the content.

comprehend Christ's love (v. 3:19). Paul exhorts believers to walk worthy of their calling with which God called them in forbearing one another in love (v. 4:2); to walk in unity by being truthful with love (v. 4:15), so that every believer contributes to the growth of the body and thus the body will be built up in love (v. 4:16); to walk in love just as Christ loved the church (v. 5:25), and as they love their own bodies (vv. 5:28, 33). Then there is a salutation of love with peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 6:23), and a benediction of grace to all of those who unceasingly love our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 6:24). Paul is emphasizing the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body which can only be based on God's love and the practice of love of the believers for one another.

In the first part of the book, Paul implies that the Holy Spirit is the seal (v. 1:13), who gives access to the Father (v. 2:18), who dwells in the new temple – the body of believers (v. 2:22), who reveals the mystery of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body (v. 3:5); and who strengthens the believers (v. 3:16). The Holy Spirit in the last part of the book is characterized as the One who brings about unity of the believers (vv. 4:3-4), who grieves at sin and seals believers (v. 4:30). Paul further implies that the Holy Spirit is the means by which believers are filled (v. 5:18); the Holy Spirit is the sword which is the preached Word of God (v. 6:17), and the One in whose power believers are exhorted to pray (v. 6:18).

The concept of the body begins where the church is defined as Christ's body (vv. 1:22-23), in which believing Jews and Gentiles are reconciled into one body (v. 2:16). Reference is made to the unity exhibited in one body (v. 4:4) of God's people given for the purpose of building up the body (vv. 4:12, 16). The church is again described as Christ's body (v. 5:23), and believers as a part of that body (v. 5:30).

The concept of the mystery in the first part is introduced (v. 1:9). Although hidden in the past ages (v. 3:9), this mystery has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets (vv. 3:4-5) – that Jewish and Gentile believers are now in one body. In the second part, the mystery is seen as the union of Christ and the church, rather than Jews and Gentiles

(v. 5:32), but the last mention of it refers to Paul making known God's work of uniting believing Jews and Gentiles into one body (v. 6:19).

Paul pointed out that before the Ephesians' conversion, they were governed by the evil one (v. 2:2), and in the second part of the book they, who had now been converted to the Lord, were exhorted to be strong in the Lord in order to stand against the schemes of evil (vv. 6:10-20). The book also begins with spiritual blessings (vv. 1:3-14) and ends with spiritual warfare (vv. 6:10-20).

2.4.1.5 *Literary genre of Ephesians*

Deissmann (1903:1-59) made a distinction between epistles²² and letters²³ (see also TAJT, 1902). Paul's letters fall into the latter category although there has been much discussion on whether or not they are to be viewed as private or personal letters.²⁴ Regarding the form of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, as well as the other Pauline epistles, it follows the normal pattern of Hellenistic letters: opening, body, and closing (Mowry, 1944:73-86; Mullins, 1964:44-50; Bahr, 1968:27-41). Ephesians, as a whole, has many characteristics of a Hellenistic letter. However, some contend that it is not accurate to call it a letter. Some suggest that it is a theological tractate clothed as a letter (Kasemann, 1958:517-520; Conzelmann & Lindemann, 1988:208). Cook (1965:3-18) cited Heinrich Schlier's view on Ephesians as a "wisdom discourse" with Christ. Nevertheless, the long *paraenesis* section (Eph 4:1-6:20), argues against a theological tract or a wisdom discourse (Schanckenburg, 1991:24-37). The epistle is concerned with a broader consideration – the Christian life as a whole. Gnllka (1971:1-21, 45-49) thinks this epistle is a liturgical homily in the form of a letter (see also MacDonald, 2008:18). Lincoln (1990:xlvi-lxxiii) suggests that since Ephesians does not address specific issues and lacks personal greetings typical of other Pauline epistles, it is a written equivalent of a sermon or

²² i.e.: artistic literary works written for public interaction by such writers as Epicurus, Seneca, and Pliny.

²³ i.e.: un-literary, private, and occasional communication, see Stirwalt *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography* 87.

²⁴ Modern discussion of this issue is vast, and some key works are selected, which are relevant to studies in Ephesians, see Exler *Form of the Ancient Greek Letter* 15-22; Schubert "Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings" 365-377.

homily. Mouton (1994:359-377) argues that those who consider Ephesians to be a written equivalent of a sermon or homily must consider a similar assessment for other Pauline letters such as Galatians, Philippians, the first epistle of Corinthians, and Romans. Most of these letters were read aloud to an audience very much like a homily. Hendrix (1988:9) and Danker (1982:451-452) propose that Ephesians is “an epistolary decree in which the author recites the universal benefactions of God and Christ, and proceeds to stipulate the appropriate honours, understood as the moral obligations of the beneficiaries.” Hendrix (1988:9) suggests that this explains some peculiar features in chapters 4-6, which set forth the obligations of the community as beneficiaries of God and Christ. Winter (1994:26-33) observed that although there are resemblances to Greco-Roman inscriptions, they are not in the form of a letter but are inscriptions of official civic resolutions (using a standard literary form) that were publicly displayed in connection with a public ceremony. Hoehner (2002:7) concludes that it is best to consider Ephesians as an actual letter with a mixture of genre and style, such as other Hellenistic and Pauline letters. It was a letter to be read to those in Ephesus and probably to the churches in the surrounding communities. This shows the proximity of the recipients of the letter to Paul’s attention so much so that Paul himself, out of his concern for the people in the church in Ephesus, took the time to write these letters to the believers in Ephesus. It may thus be said that this is a personal conviction of Paul, one that we as believers in the modern church, ought to heed to.

2.4.2 The study of grace in Ephesians: two passages standing out

Figure 2

English and Greek translations of Ephesians 1:5:7 and 2:8-9

Ephesians 1:5-7

⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will –

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Προς Εφεσίους 1:5-7

⁵ προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ,

⁶ εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ,

⁷ ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ,

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –

⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast

Προς Εφεσίους 2:8:9

⁸ τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον·

⁹ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι

2.4.2.1 Grammatical study and intertextuality

Firstly, it is important to discuss the meaning of certain key words and phrases (found both in the epistle and other supporting passages) to supplement and better understand the meaning of certain key words and phrases within the focus verses.

The first key word is ἐκλεκτός which is translated in the standard versions by such English terms as elect or chosen (Wigram & Winter, 1978:228). The word (used twenty-three times in the Greek New Testament) is employed as a substantive, ranging in function from participle to noun. Another form is εκλογή which functions as a noun and is used seven times in the Greek New Testament meaning “election or selection” (McCarthy, 2010:1). The verb form ἐκλέγομαι is used twenty-one times in the New Testament. It is the only form occurring in one of the texts being considered in this study as it is quoted in verse 1:4.

²⁵ See NIV *Holy Bible* 1013, 1014.

²⁶ See Nestle *Novum Testamentum Graece* 490, 492.

The second key word to be considered is the term προορίζω (“having predestined”) from verse 1:5, it is also used in verse 1:11. The principal difficulty concerning this phrase centres on the controversy between the advocates of the human free will (free moral agency) as opposed to the advocates of a deterministic foreordination and predestination (i.e., those who stress that both the saved and the lost were “elected” before the foundation of the world).²⁷ The view of deterministic predestination and foreordination that has affected the religious world most profoundly over the past five centuries was set forth by John Calvin. Calvin (1961:27) defined predestination as the eternal decree of God by which He decided before the foundation of the world what is to become of each and every individual, which Arminius (1853:268), Wesley (1755:11), and their followers modified or directly opposed. These opposing views strongly stressed on the importance of the free will and free moral agency of every person over human affairs.

In trying to arrive at the truth taught by this passage it is necessary to practice the principles of exegesis (Chamberlain, 1941:1-4), as we should in any passage. In this section, the grammatical, lexical and syntactical exegesis is also performed, which is essential to understand better the original meaning of the doctrine of God’s grace.

The word “predestined” in verse 1:5 is equivalent to the term “foreordained” (Whitford, 2012:87), which is from πρό – a primary preposition; “fore,” that is, in front of, or prior to (figuratively superior).²⁸ It also means above, ago, before, or ever. And ὀρίζω means “to mark out or bound” (horizon), that is, (figuratively) to appoint, decree, or specify – declare, determine, limit, or ordain. Which mean to limit in advance, which is to predetermine – determine before, ordain, or predestine (Strong, 1997:341). Thayer’s²⁹ definition of προορίζω in a part of speech is a verb – to predetermine or decide beforehand, in the New Testament of God decreeing from eternity, to foreordain, and appoint beforehand.

²⁷ For a brief review, one might consult the article of Lindsay 1939 *ISBE* 2435-2437.

²⁸ See Meyers 2016a www.e-sword.net

²⁹ See Meyers 2016b www.e-sword.net

The third keyword to consider is the word νεκρός (dead) in verse 2:1, which is the human condition before experiencing the grace of God. Human beings were dead in trespasses and sins. One may notice that the words “hath he quickened”³⁰ are in italics in some Bible version. This is because the phrase was not in the original text. If you read this verse in many other translations, you will find it missing. Thus, Ephesians 2:1 is simply saying that “we were dead in our trespasses and sins.” Νεκρός is referring to spiritual death, not physical death (Berkhof, 1996:260). Jakes (2008:82) says that νεκρός can mean either the death of the body or the death of the spirit. The word lends itself to the graphic picture of a lifeless, colourless body on a slab in the morgue with the stench of decay surrounding it. He further explains the meaning of νεκρός in Ephesians 2:1:

When the Bible talks about death, it is not talking about the cessation of life, but of separation. In the case of physical death, the Bible means the separation of the spirit from the body. Death is not the cessation of life in the sense of existence, but the move from one state of being to another. When a person dies, and their spirit separates from their body, their spirit will continue to live somewhere, either in heaven or in hell. The spirit that is dead is separated from God and cannot relate to or function in the kingdom of God. This state of being spiritually dead is due to our being under trespasses and sins. Sin separates us from God spiritually. Paul tells us that all were dead in our trespasses and sins. “Trespasses” is the word *paraptoma*, which we could describe as actions where we slipped off the right path, erred, or wandered away from what is good. “Sins” comes from the Greek [transliterated] word *hamartano*, which literally means “to miss the mark.”

(Jakes, 2008:82)

Ἀμαρτία that is used in verse 2:1 can be described as an athlete who threw a spear and missed the target; the failure of someone to achieve their purpose; or someone simply going wrong (Strong, 1997:26). Paul stresses the idea that when we were separated from God, all work on our part misses the mark and wander away from the path of God. Hence, we need God to lead the way for us, away from the darkness and futility of our own ways, towards a life for Him. Jakes (2008:83) continues on explaining the meaning of νεκρός, this time with an emphasis on God’s love for the human race:

When we were spiritually dead, we may have acknowledged God, but we had no intimate knowledge of him. We were dead to him and separated from him because of our trespasses and sins. We may have made all sorts of claims to know about God or even may have made claims to understand him, but no person who is in a state of spiritual death can truly know God because God cannot have association with sin. He cannot coexist with something which is utterly opposite and opposed to his nature, character, and vision. It is impossible for a holy and righteous God to coexist with unholy and unrighteous human beings.

³⁰ See Eph 2:1 KJV.

The power of God's love seeks to destroy sin. God hates the separation sin causes between himself and human beings. He hates the conflict sin produces because he loves us. He loves the sinner and wants the sinner to come to a state of holiness and wholeness in him.

The Scripture tells us that it is God's love for all sinners that provided the remedy for sin: Jesus Himself (Jn 3:16). "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (1 Cor 5:21; Rm 5:17). But when we were spiritually dead, God could not have intimate fellowship with us. Therefore, God elected believers and drew them to believe in Him (Eph 1:4), προορίζω (Eph 1:5), and plucked them from the νεκρός condition (Eph 2:1) by His grace.

The fourth key word to consider is the very heart of this study – χάρις – which is used in verses 1:6, 7, and 2:8. Χάρις is from a primary verb χαίρω, meaning graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude) – acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace, gracious, joy, liberality, pleasure, thanks, thankworthy (Strong, 1997:521, 523).

To Thayer (1996:665-666), χάρις means "good-will," "loving-kindness," "favour" or "favouring" as used in Luke 2:52 and the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians 8:4; "to have favour with one," also used in Acts 2:47, in 7:10 it means "attends and assists one." Χάρις as the kindness of a master toward the inferiors or servants, and so especially of God towards human beings: εὐρίσκειν χάριν παρά τῷ Θεῷ (Lk 1:30); ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ (Ac 7:46; τοῦτο χάρις ἐστίν); "this wins for us God's favour" (1 Pt 2:19); with παρά Θεῷ added, in the first epistle of Peter 2:20; παραδεδομένοι τῇ χάριτι τοῦ Θεοῦ, to be committed or commended to the protecting and helping favour of God (Ac 14:26; Ac 15:40).

The apostles and New Testament writers at the beginning and end of their epistles wrote about the favour (grace) of God, to which all blessings, especially spiritual, are due, in numerous accounts in the Scripture (see Rm 1:7; Rm 16:20, 24; 1 Cor 1:3; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 13:13; Gl 1:3; Gl 6:18; Eph 1:2; Eph 6:24; Phlp 1:2; Phlp 4:23; Col 1:2; Col 4:18; 1 Th 1:1; 1 Th 5:28; 2 Th 1:2; 2 Th 3:18; 1 Tm 1:2; 1 Tm 6:21; 2 Tm 1:2; 2 Tm 4:22; Tt 1:4; Tt 3:15; Phlm 1:3, 25; Heb 13:25; 1 Pt 1:2; 2 Pt 1:2; 2 Pt 3:18; 2 Jn 1:3; Rv 1:4; Rv 22:21).

Moreover, the word χάρις contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one a gift that is undeserved (Rm 11:6); hence, κατά χάριν and κατά ὀφείλημα are contrasted in Romans 4:4, 16; χάριτι (charity) and ἐξ ἔργων in Romans 11:6; κατ' ἀκλογην χάριτος (used in Rm 11:5); but the New Testament writers use χάρις pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestows favours, even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offenses, and bids them to accept of eternal salvation through Christ (see Rm 3:24; Rm 5:17, 20f; 1 Cor 15:10; Gl 1:15; Gl 2:21; Eph 1:6; Phlp 1:7; Col 1:6; 2 Th 2:16; 1 Tm 1:14; 2 Tm 1:9; Heb 2:9, χωρίς; Heb 10:29; Heb 12:15; Heb 13:9; 1 Pt 1:10; Jude 1:4; εὐρίσκειν χάριν, Heb 4:16; ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡσωτήριος, Tt 2:11; ὁ λόγος τῆς χάριτος, the message of his grace, Ac 14:3; Ac 20:32; τό εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Ac 20:24).

Christ's grace is further described as mercy for sinners for whom Christ left His divinity (Rondinone, 2012:174) to voluntarily undertake the miseries of human life. And by His sufferings and death, He assured salvation for the elect (Ac 15:11; 2 Cor 8:9; Rm 5:15; Gl 1:6; Tt 3:7; Jn 1:14, 17). Χάρις is "the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His holy influence upon souls, turns sinners to Christ, and keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of Christian virtues" (2 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 6:1; 2 Th 1:12; Ac 18:27), to be subject to the power of grace, as opposed to ὑπό νόμον εἶναι (Rm 6:14f; Gl 5:4; Ac 13:43), prompted by grace (Col 3:16). God's grace is promoting the progress and blessings of the Christian religion (Ac 11:23), prompting its possessors to benefactions (2 Cor 9:14), sustaining and aiding the efforts of the human beings who labour for the cause of Christ (1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12), and the favour of Christ, assisting and strengthening His followers and ministers to bear their troubles (2 Cor 12:9).

The fifth is the word υιοθεσία or the phrase "adopted as His sons" from verse 1:5. Since the word "νεκρός" mean's "separation from God", it is by grace alone that we become sons and daughters of God by adoption through Christ. Thus, υιοθεσία simply means being birthed as children into the divine family. To Thayer (1996:397, 1206), it is the nature and condition of the true disciples of Christ, who by receiving the Spirit of God, become the sons of God (Rm 8:15;

Gl 4:5). It also includes the blessed state in the future life after the visible return of Christ from heaven – ἀπεκδέχασθαι υιοθεσίαν means “to wait for adoption”, i.e. the consummate condition of the sons of God, which will render it evident that they are the sons of God (Rm 8:23, cf. Rm 8:19). According to Scofield (2004:1556), the believers’ relation with God as His children results from the new birth (cf. Jn 1:12-13). Adoption is the act of God, whereby one who is already a child of God, through redemption from the law, is placed in the position of an adult son (Gl 4:1-5). The indwelling Spirit gives the realization of this in the believers’ present experiences (Gl 4:6) but the full manifestation of a believer’s sonship awaits the resurrection which shall transform them into saints, called “the redemption of the body” (Rm 8:23; 1 Th 4:14-17; Eph 1:14; 1 Jn 3:2). The Pauline understanding of the word “adoption” can also mean justification (as can be gleaned in Romans).

Paul writes of sin and justification in terms of two men: Adam and Christ. Through Adam, sin and death came into the world; through Christ, righteousness came into the world bringing about justification (Moo, 1996:29). Paul writes that the death and resurrection of Christ are both the fulfilment of the Old Testament and therefore, the basis and anticipation of the final glory (Rm 8:17) with Christ and the climax of history (Moo, 1996:26). According to Paul, history is divided into two eras, each with its own vanguard – Adam and Christ respectively (Barclay, 1988:98). Each era has its own government: sin, the law, flesh, and death on the first or old era; and righteousness, grace, the spirit, and life on the second or new era (Moo, 1996:28). Westerholm (1992:167) explains that man starts out in the old era by virtue of participation in the sinful act by which it was founded, that is Adamic nature or the sin of Adam (Rm 5:12). But one can be shifted to the new era by becoming joined through faith to Christ, who is the founder of the new era (Rm 6:1-6).

According to Furnish (1968:135) justification by faith is ultimately determinative to Paul’s salvation-historical scheme. Therefore, the person who lives after Christ’s death and resurrection, who has not appropriated the benefits of those events of the new era, is enslaved to sin in the flesh, and doomed to eternal death. In relation to the church, Westerholm

(1992:168) rightly suggests that justification by faith is central to Paul's theology because it expresses a crucial element in Paul's understanding of God's work through Christ and by extension, the church.

Carson (1992:67) writes that there is a clear eschatological sense implied in Paul's usage of the term "justification." In Romans 8:30, Paul connects justification with predestination and glorification. He further states that those who are justified cannot be separated from Christ (Rm 8:33-39). Carson (1992:68) explains that the idea of justification or of a judicial act is not only applied on to the present process of the religious life, but also reserved in the last judgment; the divine justification which was accomplished at the cross, is expected to be consummated on the last day, when there will be definitive acquittal.

In Romans 8:16-19, Paul clearly states that believers in Christ through faith, are already sons of God in the present, but their "adoption" is not yet fully manifest to the world. Robinson (1979:121) upon examining Paul's use of "justification" likewise understands that justification, in the present tense in Romans 3:28, shows that the "process" of being made right before God is initiated in this life, and brought to completion in the final judgment. There is in justification a vindication for the believer that will not take place until the last day (Westerholm, 1992:201). While salvation is secured through the death of Christ and applied through faith (Rm 6), vindication will be fully manifest in the completion of justification in the final judgment of God (see also Mt 25).

The sixth word to consider is the word περιπατέω (walk) that was used in literary context as *paraenesis* (vv. 4:1-6:20) – duties or ethics used in literary structure (Eph 4-6); which means a "walk in unity," (vv. 4:1-16), "walk in holiness" (vv. 4:17-23), "walk in love" (vv. 5:1-6), "walk in light" (vv. 5:7-14), and "walk in wisdom" (vv. 5:15-6:9) to stand in warfare (vv. 6:10-20), (Hoehner, 2002:497-817). According to Heil (2007:1-4, 93-278), the word "walks" in Ephesians means "empowerment" to walk for the unity of all to live in Christ. The word περιπατέω (walk) means to progress; figuratively, to live, deport oneself or follow (Strong, 1997:374). By the grace of God, He enables us to walk in righteousness.

The last word to consider is the word ἀπολύτρωσις (redemption) in verse 1:7, which refers to Christ in whom “redemption” is made possible through His blood. The blessings referred to in 1:3 are specified – beginning with redemption – τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν (cf. Vincent’s word studies).³¹ It is a redemption through blood because the proper propitiation or expiation for sin is blood alone, being the emblem of explanation (Bible Hub, 2016). In Christ, we have or are having this blessing; it is not merely in existence, it is ours being in Him through faith; it is not a privilege of the future but of the present where we also relish the forgiveness of our sins. According to Thayer³² the ἄφεσις (forgiveness) denotes release from bondage or imprisonment which is also used in Psalm 103:12 NIV, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us,” according to the riches of His grace.” The completeness of the forgiveness, the security of its being continued in the future, and such like qualities show the richness of God’s grace (see also Mt 18:27; Lk 7:42, 47).

According to Mueller (1982:24), the salvific act of God or the redemptive work of Christ has two dimensions. The first one is the enabling power of the redemption for the believers to glorify God and be like Jesus Christ as spiritually alive through the Spirit or the ἰλάσκομαι³³ as used in Hebrews 2:17. The second one is the reconciliation of all through Christ’s blood; or the καταλλάσσω³⁴ which is used in the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:18-20).

2.4.2.2 *Theology and message*

2.4.2.2.1 Regeneration and sonship in Christ (Ephesians 1:5-6)

Ephesians 1:5 shows the central divine purpose to which all the infinite love of God results: To “foreordain us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself.”

God adopts believers into sonship through a spiritual rebirth, although gradual, and may for a long time be hardly discernible. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul had, time and again,

³¹ See Meyers 2016c www.e-sword.net

³² Cited by Meyers 2016d www.e-sword.net

³³ See Strong *Greek Dictionary* 229.

³⁴ See Strong *Greek Dictionary* 249.

admonished them to put away falsehood and speak the truth; that they must give up thieving, and foul talk, and covetousness, and gross sensual sin (vv. 5:15-20, 21-33) despite the fact that he addresses them as saints (v. 1:1). This means that Paul considered the believers to whom he was referring, as already regenerate, yet for some of them, the moral effects of regeneration were incomplete because the change which regeneration was ultimately certain to produce in their moral lives had only begun, and which may be said to have been hindered by hostile influences (cf. SB, 2016). Nevertheless, as Dale (2009:40) put it, "Christ dwells forever in the infinite love of God, and as we are in Christ, the love of God for Christ is in a wonderful manner, ours too. What God has done for us is to the praise of the glory of His grace."³⁵

2.4.2.2.2 The final restoration (Ephesians 1:5-7)

Spurgeon (1867:267; 1862:471) says that through divine mercy, humanity will ultimately achieve complete triumph over misery and moral evil. Paul, through Ephesians, conveys that all, across any era, in any land, in any world, who have erred and strayed from God, are to be brought back by the good shepherd to the flock and to the fold. But this Epistle, like the other documents contained in the New Testament, was not written for persons who were uninstructed in the Christian faith. If anything is clear about the teaching of Christ and His apostles, it is that they warned sinners not to reject the divine mercy and so become irrevocably exiles from God's presence and joy (Brooks, 1872:95). They assumed that some would be guilty of this supreme crime and would be doomed to this ultimate woe. Piper (2015a) preaches that some will inherit eternal life, by referring to the final restoration in Christ, but some will also be punished with the second death. When Paul spoke of God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the Ephesian Christians would misunderstand his meaning. Dale (2009:90) explains that while those who had incurred irrevocable exclusion from the life with God were to receive the just punishment of their sin and perish, the rest of the moral universe was to be organized into a perfect unity for eternal ages of righteousness and glory.

³⁵ See Meyers 2016e www.e-sword.net

2.4.2.2.3 Salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Lloyd-Jones (2017) says that it is in Ephesians 2:8-10 where the apostle Paul brings to focus what he has been conducting in the first seven verses of Ephesians, Lloyd-Jones supposes that in certain respects, we can say that there is no more important doctrinal statement anywhere in the Epistle than in this passage. To Paul the doctrine of justification by faith was not the final statement of Christian truth. Cunningham (1822:203) and Lynch (1861:49) say that any account of the relationship between God and human beings, which does not include this conception, is fatally defective and is absolutely erroneous; but this concept does not exhaust the divine relation with the human race. There are other relations between God and human beings that cannot be expressed in terms of law, and it is these relations which Paul is dealing with in this Epistle.

“Grace transcends love. Love may be nothing more than the fulfilment of the law, but grace is love which passes beyond all claims to love. Grace transcends mercy. Mercy forgives sin and rescues the sinner from eternal darkness and death; but grace floods with affection the sinner who deserve anger and resentment. If human salvation has its origin in the infinite grace of God, if by that grace it is carried through to its eternal consummation, then our true position is one of immeasurable trust and hope” (SB, 2016). Dale (2009:170) preaches that we have only to receive the infinite blessings of the divine love; we have to surrender ourselves to that stream of eternal benediction which has its fountains in the eternal depths of the divine nature; we have to make way for the free unfolding in our life and destiny the divine idea and purpose.

2.5 Conclusion

Pauline grace can be understood as consisting of two invariable things: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self (Inst. 1.1.1). Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ we were made alive. The very lesson for this chapter is summed up by answering how faithful we are to the original text meaning of Scripture. Interpretations that are not aligned to the original intended

meaning may be categorized implicitly under the scheme of eisegesis³⁶ which fall short of proper hermeneutics and slips into the danger of homiletics in the “here and now” – shaping interpretation to fit today’s context – cultural-driven interpretations, where change is seen as progress and is contrary to the fundamental characteristic of God and the Scripture which is that God never changes (MI 3:6) and His Word remains eternal. Christianity bids us to believe that God has known everything from the very beginning. He is all-knowing, and His authority is everlasting. What He said, inspired and articulated through His people, is what He says even until today.

We must read the Scripture through the lens of the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection – for this is the singular point of Scripture. In a nutshell, the primary and fundamental essence of the Scripture is to present God to humanity. Conscientious interpretation suggests that a word from the Scripture should not be separated from the context where it is written, and the meanings ought not to be animated by using references alien to the Scripture itself. Rather, a careful investigation of Scripture’s true original meaning within the context where it was articulated should be undertaken. Texts are ought to be interpreted along with its author and its historicity. The idea of an original meaning is not without complications, for even the audiences of the Bible sometimes misunderstood what the original author was trying to say. Further, some of the words of the Bible were first spoken orally and later written down. Thus, biblical words and lexicon might have their own different definitions which came from different world meanings. Even inside the Bible itself, similar terms differ in meanings, depending on the context. Indeed, exegesis is crucial and essential to a scholar of God’s word. Correct hermeneutics is therefore necessary in the accurate study of the Word of God.

In essence, Pauline grace shows us that human beings were once spiritually dead because of transgressions and sins. However, because God is sovereign over sin, He sent His Son to the world and raised Christ from the dead to draw the mystical union of the believers in Christ.

³⁶ Commonly referred to as, reading into the text; it’s the process of interpreting a text or portion of text in such a way that the process introduces one’s own presuppositions, agendas, or biases into and onto the text, see Webster “New Collegiate Dictionary” 364.

Hence, through Him and with Him, sinners were redeemed from death to life. Therefore, Paul's concept of grace is simple yet profound. His message directs us to believe that Christ became the sinner's righteousness. The believer's union with Christ brought justification and sanctification to the sin-stained human being. God Himself, by His sovereign will, adopted the predestined (elected ones) as His own children with Christ, who is the head of the true church or the divine family.

Paul's idea of grace is two-fold. First is the reconciliation of all humanity with Christ, which is the "common grace" as held by theologians such as Bavinck (1989:35-65). Second is the salvation of sinners where God plucks the elected ones out from the forsaken world to enable them to glorify Him. This is God setting apart (sanctification) His children from the fallen world so that they may enter God's family. This is what Kuyper (2001:4) and D'Assonville (2002:312-315) called, in the Reformed tradition, "particular grace." In both levels, we have seen God's extreme love for humanity, that because of this ultimate love, He has drawn sinners who are unworthy towards Him.

It is also fundamental to point out that Paul's writings are also susceptible to misinterpretation, as any other writings; that to stay faithful to the gospel message, we have to step back and refer to its central purpose, which is Christ – the knowledge of God and His works for and in the perfection of salvation. Apart from this perspective, we may be treading to a dangerous path of forming another cult.

CHAPTER 3

CALVINISTIC GRACE:

THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND THE SALVATION OF SINNERS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we established that the Scripture must be read through the lens of the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection. Central to the true interpretation of the Scripture is the foundational understanding that the primary context of the Bible is ultimately underpinned in Christ. A paradigm shift away from a Christ-centred understanding tends to result to a subjective interpretation of Scripture shaped to suit personal preferences and prejudices, which further contributes to the confusion and noise rather than towards the clear understanding of Scripture. Subjective or relative interpretation polarizes Bible-believers and blurs the message of Scripture. The resulting relativity in the understanding of the meanings articulated in the passages is furthered when such erroneous interpretations and understandings are institutionalized and established under a label of dogma. Evidently, there are as many labels of beliefs as there are different interpretations and understandings of the Scripture.

The right understanding of Scripture is fundamental to the accurate understanding of the message the Scripture wants to reveal – Christ Himself, that is – His works, death and resurrection in relation to the salvation and redemption of human beings from sin and death. There is no room for a subjective colouring of the meaning of Scripture; otherwise, a different understanding of the narrative of Christ and His works may surface. Such misguided tendencies are what biblical scholars have fought against in order to keep the integrity of the message of Christ intact. History however shows that it was not always the case that the understanding of the Scripture was uniform across Christian groups. Significant clashes on fundamental points in the Bible have often surfaced. Some clashes are notable and observed to have continued even until today. Of them, the grace debate has often been the most contentious throughout history,

incessant and dynamic even in contemporary Christianity, such that one who is theologizing will inevitably have to address the conflict on the true message of the Scripture on Christ's grace and its role in the salvific narrative. Over the course of theological history, many seemingly arbitrary definitions and esoteric arguments have arisen out of it.

This section of the study will show ecclesiastical conflicts between and among Christian beliefs especially that of the Arminian thought as against the Reformed perspective on the ontological concept of grace and its soteriological impacts. But before we talk about the clashes between these two groups, we have to talk about Calvinism because it is notably a resurfacing topic in theology. It has been popularly referred to in most, if not all, studies of the grace doctrine. This part of the study will focus on the core of the Reformed or Calvinistic grace doctrine explained through the five points of Calvinism, otherwise known through the acronym "TULIP".

3.2 The rise of Calvinism

The Reformed Church arose out of two distinct figures but of the same Protestant spirit during the 16th century. The first is Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) who died before the Counter Reformation by Martin Luther began. The second is John Calvin (1509–1564) who was active during the crucial period of the Roman Catholic reformation in Switzerland (McNeil, 1967:3-4). The Reformed faith gradually expanded in England including France, Germany and in the Netherlands until the Dutch Reformed church became the legally accepted religion in the region, though Catholicism and other Protestant sects were tolerated (Benedict, 2002:200-201).

According to Van Leeuwen *et al.* (2009:ix-xxi) despite its popularity, Calvinism was ultimately challenged by Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609). Although trained in the Reformed tradition and was a pastor of the Reformed congregation in Amsterdam (1588), he had serious doubts on the Reformist perspective on salvation and questioned the teachings of Calvin on grace. Following Arminius' death in 1609, in 1610, the "Five Points of Arminianism" based on Arminius' teachings was published by his followers. The Arminians, as his followers came to be called, presented these five points to the State of Holland in the form of a "remonstrance", insisting that the Belgic

Confession of faith and the Heidelberg Catechism (the official expression of the doctrinal position of the churches of Holland) must be changed to conform to the doctrinal views contained in the remonstrance. The Arminians objected to the Reformed catechism which patronized divine sovereignty, human inability, unconditional election or predestination, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. It was in connection with these matters that the Arminians wanted the official standards of the Church of Holland to be revised (Van Leeuwen *et al.*, 2009:xv), and their own minority views to be protected and recognized too by the government.

3.3 The Synod of Dort: the rejection of the Remonstrance and the formation of the five points of Calvinism

In order to resolve the growing intensity of the Arminian-Calvinism conflict, in 1618, a national Synod was called to meet in Dordrecht (in Netherlands) for the purpose of examining the views of Arminius in light of the Scripture. The great Synod was convened by the state-general of Holland on 13th November 1618. There were 84 members and 18 secular commissioners. Included were 27 delegates from Germany, the Palatinate, Switzerland and England. After 154 sessions, lasting seven months, the Five Points of Arminianism was declared to be heretical (Steele & Thomas, 1963:14). "The Synod," Warburton (1955:61) wrote, "had given a very close examination to the 'Five Points' which had been advanced by the Remonstrants and had compared the teaching advanced in them with the testimony of the Scripture. Failing to reconcile that teaching with the word of God, which they had definitely declared could alone be accepted by them as the rule of faith, they had unanimously rejected them. They felt, however, that a mere rejection was not sufficient. It remained for them to set forth the true Calvinistic teaching in relationship to those matters which had been called into question. This they proceeded to do, embodying the Calvinistic position in five chapters which have ever since been known as 'The Five Points of Calvinism.'"

Calvin himself did not arrange the Five Points – (T) total depravity, (U) unconditional election, (L) limited atonement, (I) irresistible grace, and the (P) perseverance of saints – more popularly

referred to as TULIP – devised as a defence against the followers of Arminius who countered the prevailing Calvinistic confessional position in Holland (Spencer, 2002:7). Though the TULIP does not fully embrace the scope of Calvinism as it is merely Calvinism’s five answers to the five errors of Arminianism, it however, lies at the heart of the Reformed faith, particularly in Reformed soteriology.

3.4 The rebuttal to the Remonstrance: the origin of the Five Points of Calvinism

3.4.1 The Remonstrance by the Arminians

Since TULIP was intentionally designed to counter the Five Points of Arminianism, the latter’s philosophical basis should be studied. Nicole (1960:64) substantially summarized the five articles contained in the remonstrance as follows:

- (1) God elects or reprobates on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief;
- (2) Christ died for all human races and for every human being, although only believers are saved;
- (3) Human being is so depraved that divine grace is necessary unto faith or any good deed,
- (4) This grace may be resisted; and,
- (5) Whether all who are truly regenerate will certainly persevere in the faith is a point which needs further investigation.

The last article was later altered so as to accommodate the possibility that the truly regenerate believers may lose their faith and thus lose their salvation. Steele and Thomas (1963:13) say that Arminians, however, have not agreed on this point – some have held that all who are regenerated by the Spirit of God are eternally secure and can never perish.

Packer (1926:3-4), in analysing the system of thought embodied in the remonstrance, observed that “the theology which it contained stemmed from two philosophical principles: first, that divine sovereignty is not compatible with human freedom, nor therefore with human responsibility; second, that ability limits obligation. From these principles, the Arminians drew two deductions: first, that since the Bible regards faith as a free and responsible act, it cannot be caused by God, but is exercised independently of Him; second, that since the Bible regards faith as obligatory on the part of all who hear the gospel, ability to believe must be universal.” Hence, Arminians held that the Scripture must be interpreted as teaching the following positions: (1) Human beings are never so completely corrupted by sin that they cannot believe the gospel

when it is put before them, nor (2) are they ever so completely controlled by God that they cannot reject it; (3) God's election of those who shall be saved is prompted by His foreseeing that they will, of their own accord, believe; (4) Christ's death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift), what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe; and, (5) it rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith. Those who fail eventually will fall away and will be lost.

Thus, Arminianism considered salvation to depend ultimately on human faith. Saving faith is accorded as human faith and not God's in them. Contrary to the Arminians' preference on the human free will being independent of God, is the Calvinist concept of the sinful nature of human beings, disabling them to choose God when free of any divine intervention. Ultimately, the debate centres to the extent of God's work in human salvation.

Steele and Thomas (1963:16-19) provide a clear comparative contrast between the Five Points of Arminianism and the Five Points of Calvinism (see also Spencer, 2002:14-20):

Table 2

Comparative juxtaposition between the Five Points of Arminianism and the Five Points of Calvinism

The five points of Arminianism	The five points of Calvinism
<p style="text-align: center;">Free will or human ability</p> <p>Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, human beings have not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with human freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and their eternal destiny depends on how they use it. Human beings' freedom consists of their ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; their will is not enslaved to their sinful nature. The sinners have the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinners need the Spirit's assistance, but they do not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before they can believe, for faith is a</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Total inability or total depravity</p> <p>Because of the fall, human beings themselves are unable to savingly believe the gospel. The sinners are dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; their hearts are deceitful and desperately corrupt. Their wills are not free, but in bondage to their evil nature, therefore, they will not – indeed they cannot – choose “good” over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring sinners to Christ – it takes regeneration, by which the Spirit makes the sinners alive and gives them a new nature. Faith is not something human beings contribute to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation – it is God's gift to the sinners, not the sinners' gift to God.</p>

<p>human act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinners' gift to God; it is human beings' contribution to salvation.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Conditional election</p> <p>God's choice of certain individuals for salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would, of themselves, freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what human beings would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinners by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from human beings' will. It was left entirely up to human beings as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus, the sinners' choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinners, is the ultimate cause of salvation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unconditional election</p> <p>God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in human beings. Those whom God sovereignly elected, He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus, God's choice of the sinners, not the sinners' choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Universal redemption or general atonement</p> <p>Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all human races and for every human being, only those who believe in Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if human being chooses to accept it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Particular redemption or limited atonement</p> <p>Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Holy Spirit can be effectually resisted</p> <p>The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as human beings are free, they can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinners until they believe; faith (which is human beings' contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, human beings' free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinners respond,</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The efficacious call of the Spirit or irresistible grace</p> <p>In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited by human beings' will in His work of applying salvation, nor is</p>

<p>the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by human beings.</p>	<p>He dependent upon human beings' cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinners to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Falling from grace</p> <p>Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith.</p> <p>(Arminians have not agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ that once a sinner is regenerated, he will never be lost).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Perseverance of the saints</p> <p>All who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of the Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">According to Arminianism:</p> <p>Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and human beings (who must respond) – human response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, will "choose" to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, the will of the human beings plays a decisive role; thus, the sinner, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">According to Calvinism:</p> <p>Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the Triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ' death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not human, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Rejected by the Synod of Dort</p> <p>The system of thought contained in the "Remonstrance" (though the "five points" were not originally arranged in the current order) was submitted by the Arminians to the Church of Holland in 1610 for adoption but was rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1619 on the ground that it was unscriptural.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reaffirmed by the Synod of Dort</p> <p>This system of theology was reaffirmed by the Synod of Dort in 1619 as the doctrine of salvation contained in the Holy Scriptures. The system was at that time formulated into "five points" (in answer to the five points submitted by the Arminians) and has ever since been known as "the five points of Calvinism."</p>

In the beginning of this chapter, the need to mine the true interpretation and meaning of the Scripture, especially on the contentious topic of grace, was emphasized. The conflict between the Arminians and the Calvinists is testament to the tendencies of a polarized interpretation of Scripture. The two profess intricate mutually exclusive concepts of how sinners come to the salvation of God. Steele and Thomas (1963:22) recognized the gravity of the Arminian-Calvinist

debate as one that ultimately affects the Christian's concept of God, of sin and of salvation. Packer (2015) wrote that "the difference is that Calvinism recognizes a dimension of the saving love of God which Arminianism missed: God's sovereignty in bringing human beings to faith and keeping in faith all who is actually saved." Packer (1990:58-59) further stated that the crucial and broader issue was whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin or whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith, whether Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation or of self-reliance and self-effort.

Steele and Thomas (1963:24) pointed out that although it is important to have a background knowledge on the history of Calvinism and Arminianism, the essential question that ought to be given weight is which of these two is truly supported by Scripture. The word of God is the only authority and credible crucible to test which should be accepted, not a council nor a people. Hence, if Calvinism is supported by Scripture, there is no reason for Christians to reject it; on the contrary, any teaching apart from the word of God must be questioned in light of the Scripture.

3.4.2 The Calvinistic theology of grace: The Five Points of Calvinism

The central assertion of Calvin's proposition is that God saves every person whom He has chosen and that His decision is not frustrated by the unrighteousness or inability of human beings.

3.4.2.1 Total depravity (T)

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; as a natural human being, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, are not able, by their own strengths, to convert themselves, or to prepare themselves thereunto.³⁷

Calvin³⁸ believed that the fall of the human person to sin³⁹, dramatically changed humanity for the worse, if not the worst. Thus, the human being was wholly corrupted – the mind and heart

³⁷ WCF 9:3.

³⁸ Inst 2:1:8f and 2:3:1f.

³⁹ See Gn 3.

altogether.⁴⁰ Calvin was hugely influenced by Augustine's teachings about the human condition (Cross & Livingstone, 2005:1203). According to Augustine (1953:219, 381) although human beings are willing to choose to do good, we cannot actually do so, because it is not in our power to do that which is good as a consequence of the original sin flowing within us, which is in a manner hereditary. The taint of the original sin in us is indelible that no human good work can ever erase it. Because of the fall, human beings spiritually died. Genesis 2:16-17 NIV says, "And the Lord God commanded man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." Sure enough, because of the disobedience of the first man in the garden, human beings spiritually died. Paul says in Romans 5:12 NIV, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people" (cf. Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:13). Because of sin, human beings became blind and deaf to the things of God and are therefore unable, by themselves, to choose what is spiritually good (O'Connell, 1989:133).⁴¹ Genesis 6:5 NIV talks of how evil overcame humanity, "the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (cf. Ec 9:3; Jr 17:9; Mk 7:21-23). As a consequence of the falling into sin, every person is enslaved by and in bondage to sin. Ephesians 2:1-2 says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (cf. Jn 8:44; Eph 2:1-2; 2 Tm 2:25-26; 1 Jn 5:19; Rm 6:20; Tt 3:3). Total depravity or corruption will not allow the human person to independently choose and love God; rather, it directs human inclinations to serve only human will and desire. The human will, is induced by a necessity to direct itself according to its nature, towards that which is forbidding. Calvin⁴² says that "when the will is enchained as the slave of sin, it cannot make a movement towards goodness, far less steadily pursue it."

⁴⁰ See Inst 2:1:8f and 2:3:1f.

⁴¹ See also Inst 2:3:5.

⁴² Inst 1:3:5.

“Total depravity” however, is not the same as “absolute depravity”⁴³ (Palmer, 1972:11), in which sinners are as totally or completely corrupt in their actions and thoughts as it is possible, rather, the modifier “total” refers to that which is affecting every part of a person disabling that person to morally choose to follow God out of the necessity of human nature (see also Steele & Thomas, 1963:25). For Calvin⁴⁴, total depravity does not imply that one can never do anything good by human’s accounting, rather, it merely meant that no amount of good deeds will allow human beings to be redeemed from sinfulness or to be clothed in righteousness before the eyes of a holy and perfect God. As the inner condition is evil and there is no zeal whatsoever for God’s glory, such outward virtue has no merit before God.⁴⁵ Good works do not discredit the fact that human beings have fallen and are in a state of sinfulness. And fallen human beings, left in their dead state, are totally unable to repent, to believe the gospel, or to come voluntarily to Christ. Calvin⁴⁶ remarked on the vanity of human merit, “the virtues which deceive us by an empty show may have their praise in civil society and the common intercourse of life, but before God’s judgment-seat they will be of no value to establish a claim of righteousness” (Jn 6:44, 6:65; Rm 3:9-12; Rm 8:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14). All good may only be derived from God alone, and in no way from the human person, for John 3:6 says “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.”

Calvin⁴⁷ emphasized that only by the leading of the Spirit, are human beings able to choose God due to the handicap caused by our sinful nature. In Romans 3:10-18 NIV, Paul lays down the premise as to why there is a desperate need for God’s mercy, because “there is no one righteous, not one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does ‘good,’ not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit; the poison of vipers is on their lips; their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know; there is no fear of God before their

⁴³ As human beings are being as bad as possible that they cannot do anything good, see Palmer *Five Points of Calvinism* 11.

⁴⁴ See Inst 5.

⁴⁵ See Inst 3:14:1-2.

⁴⁶ Inst 2:3:4.

⁴⁷ Comm on Rm 37, 2:166-167.

eyes.” Calvin⁴⁸ explains that Paul wrote this passage not merely to “upbraid human beings in order that they may repent, but to teach that all are overwhelmed with inevitable calamity and can be delivered from it only by God’s mercy. As this could not be proved without previously proving the overthrow and destruction of nature, he [Paul] produced those passages to show that [human beings’] ruin is complete.”

The doctrine of total depravity underpins the necessity of God’s grace for human redemption. The sinner’s total inability to step up the salvation ladder leaves the sinner powerless and incapacitated to gather oneself from a doomed state, left with no other means than to plead desperation for a saving God for deliverance from such despair. It is with the concept that we are independently unable to choose our salvation which the Arminians dissented. Though Arminians believe in the miserable condition of human beings and even acknowledges that humanity is indeed spiritually sick as a result of sin, they however argue that we still maintain the ability, by cooperating with the Holy Spirit, to choose what is spiritually good and that we can still, by our own doing, come before God. We may determine our eternal destiny by either accepting or rejecting God’s mercies (Gore, 2016). According to Arminians, God, through what they call the “prevenient grace”⁴⁹ given to all people, calls out the sinners, without reference to their faith or works, to exercise our God-given free will to whether or not choose the salvation offered by Him. Arminius (1853:465) writes, “But it is not suitable that God should use His infinite power to effect that, to which he is borne by natural desire, and it is useful for human beings, that this will of God should be presented to them as conditional, indeed, rather than as absolute ... For if human beings wish to be saved, they must believe, because God has appointed that humanity shall be saved only through faith.” Picirilli (2002:153) explains that prevenient grace or pre-regenerating grace is simply another term for God convicting or convincing human beings to believe in Him; that God persuades us to choose Him, however, we can also will to reject His call to us.

⁴⁸ Inst 2:3:2.

⁴⁹ Prevenient grace is defined as “anticipating, going before, and preceding,” (see Picirilli *Grace* 153); It is a grace preceding actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration, see Arminius *Works of James Arminius* 300.

While both the Arminians and Calvinists recognize the desolate state of human condition, the two faiths however contrasted the role and operationalization of human will in salvation. According to Cunningham (1864:569), the role of the human will has been the centre of many theological conjectures because of its mysterious character in the human-God relation. For Arminianism, salvation may be attained through the combined exertion of God, who initiates, and humans, who respond (Steele and Thomas, 1963:19) – the human response having a divisive role in one’s salvation. To this Kuiper (1959:40) argues, “This cardinal doctrine of the word of God, Arminianism does great violence, for it teaches that God did no more than make salvation possible through the death of his Son, and that it is for the sinners to make their salvation actual by the acceptance of Christ in faith of their own free volition. Thus, the realization of salvation is made to depend on the human’s will, not God’s will. Human beings become their own saviour. Salvation is no longer ‘of God that showed mercy,’ but ‘of them that willed.’” Calvin⁵⁰ wrote that those who believe that salvation can be attained through human-will have bestowed on men more than they possess for the study of virtue. Calvin⁵¹ objected against the doctrine of co-operation between God and the human to work out salvation. Calvin said, “While it attributes the effectual desire of good to divine grace, it insinuates that human beings, by their own nature, desire good in some degree, though ineffectually.” For the Reformists, the inward call to the elect is irrevocable, needless of any response from the human because God effectually brings those whom He calls to faith in Christ, thus ascribing glory to Him alone.

3.4.2.2 *Unconditional election (U)*

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from the primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He, from eternity, appointed the mediator and head of the elect and the foundation of salvation. This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common mystery, God has decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His word and spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His son,

⁵⁰ Inst 1:2.

⁵¹ Inst 1:2.

finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy, and for the praise of the riches of His glorious grace.⁵²

Because of the stream of sin in us, we were separated from God. Isaiah 59:2 NIV says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Sin has extinguished the bond that humanity had with God and therefore, we cannot respond in faithful obedience to the invitation of God. We are not able to choose for ourselves to obey God, rather we are compelled by our nature to disobey Him. Hence, God had to ultimately exercise His sovereignty and grace for our sake (Taylor, 2015). God could have decided not to save us at all because He owes no responsibility to save the human race; rather, humanity is to blame for severing the God-human relationship to begin with. To put matters into perspective, we are indeed undeserving of salvation. Paul⁵³ said:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

It is in the realization that we are undeserving of God’s gift of salvation that the doctrine of unconditional election finds clarity and sense (Steele & Thomas, 1963:30).

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your ancestors that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt.

(Dt 7:6-8 NIV)

Unconditional election entails that God, by His sovereign will, has chosen before the foundation of the world, those whom He will bring to Himself, not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, His choice is “unconditionally” grounded in His mercy and grace. Sproul (2011:128-129) explains that election is “unconditional” in the sense that God does not depend His choice upon some future condition in human beings that He foresees because no one is qualified for salvation. Romans 3:10 tells us that, “there is no one righteous, not even one,” but God in His kindness chose to save some and bring reconciliation to the world. Those chosen

⁵² CD 1th head: art 7.

⁵³ Eph 2:1-3 NIV.

receive salvation through Christ. “For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rm 8:29 NIV).

The Arminians contend that “foreknew” refer to the cognitive act by which God knew or identified the members of His family (as distinct from all others), even before the foundation of the world (Cottrell, 2000:505-511); that God identified and chose His people by the fact that they will be the ones who will love Him and who will meet the required conditions for salvation; that through His divine omniscience, God knew that His chosen ones will eventually accept His message, even at that point, He predestined them to be part of His glorified heavenly family through the resurrection from spiritual death. Spurgeon (1988:7:22) however rebuts this contention thus:

“Whom He did foreknow, he also did predestine,” and many senses have been given to this word “foreknow,” though in this case one commends itself beyond every other. Some have thought that it simply means that God predestined human beings whose future history He foreknew. The text before us cannot be so understood, because the Lord foreknows the history of every human being, and angel, and devil. So far as mere prescience goes, every human being is foreknown, and yet no one will assert that all human beings are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. But, it is further assented that the Lord foreknew who would exercise repentance, who would believe in Jesus, and who would persevere in a consistent life to the end. This is readily granted, but readers must wear very powerful magnifying spectacles before they will be able to discover that sense in the text. Upon looking carefully at my Bible again I do not perceive such a statement. Where are those words which you have added, “Whom he did foreknow to repent, to believe, and to persevere in grace?” I do not find them either in the English version or in the Greek original. If I could so read them the passage would certainly be very easy, and would greatly alter my doctrinal views; but, as I do not find those words there, begging your pardon, I do not believe in them. However wise and advisable a human interpolation may be, it has no authority with us; we bow to the Holy Scripture, but not to glosses which theologians may choose to put upon it. No hint is given in the text of foreseen virtue any more than of foreseen sin, and, therefore, we are driven to find another meaning for the word. We find that the word “know” is frequently used in the Scripture, not only for knowledge, but also for favour, love, and complacency.

Murray (1960:317) wrote that the word foreknew is also “synonymous with ‘love’ – to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action... It means ‘whom He knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight and is virtually equivalent to ‘whom He foreloved.’” Steele and Thomas (2017:1) argue that the word “foreknew” means that God set His heart upon certain individuals; those He predestined or marked out to be saved. Notice that the text does not say that God knew something about particular individuals, but it explicitly states that God knew the individuals themselves – those whom He knew, He predestined to be made

like Christ. The word “foreknew” here is thus understood to be equivalent to “foreloved” – those who were the objects of God’s love, He marked out for salvation. In Jeremiah 1:5 NIV, God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” The Bible suggests that even before time, God has already known and chosen those He will call unto Himself. The second epistle of Paul to Timothy 2:19, says that “the Lord knows those who are His and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness”. Still, the first epistle of Peter 1:20 says, that “human beings were chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

Arminians argue that God’s election is based on human beings’ foreseen faith. This is grounded on the fact that God is all knowing and that therefore, He can foresee what will happen. Before the foundation of the world, God chose certain individuals for salvation based on His foreseeing that they would, of their own free will, choose Him. This belief emphasizes the ability of sinners to choose, by their own free will, for their salvation. Calvin (1997:11) remarked that the main difference between his theology and to other theologies lies within “the freedom of each human beings whether they are partakers of the grace of adoption or not; and accordingly, each can determine by their own will either the state of election for themselves or that of reprobation. Substantially what they do is wrest the ground of salvation of God’s own hand where alone it rightly belongs, and to deposit it within the contingent realm of human volition and free will.”

Those of the human race that are predestined to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel of good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, to everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or Perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.⁵⁴

Ultimately, God will do what He will do. He is sovereign in His grace. It is in accordance with His will that He chooses.⁵⁵ He cannot be dictated upon nor can He be moved of anything without

⁵⁴ WCF 3:5.

⁵⁵ Eph 1:4-5 NIV, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight, in love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.”

His willing. It is by His sovereign will that He has chosen⁵⁶ and elected those that He would save, even those that are, as all human beings are, not seeking good and not seeking righteousness (2 Tm 1:9).⁵⁷ He imposes no criteria or qualification for human beings to fulfil because “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (1 Cor 1:27-29 NIV).

God’s choice drawing certain individuals to salvation is not based on any foreseen response of obedience on the part of the person. “It is not based on our willing or on our running, but upon the sovereign purpose of God” (Sproul, 2011:128). Deuteronomy 10:15 says, “Yet the Lord set His affection on your ancestors and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations ...” Still, John 6:65 reads, “... this is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them.” More profound is Romans 8:29-30, “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.” Clearly, Scripture tells us that it is not by our free will and choosing that we come to the salvation of God, but it is by the sovereign will of God, out of His grace that He qualifies those who come to His salvation knowledge. God’s choice was not based upon any foreseen faith or good works. He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus even before the beginning of time.⁵⁸

Peter⁵⁹ says that faith and good works are the result of, not the ground of predestination:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if

⁵⁶ Eph 1:11 NIV, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.”

⁵⁷ Rm 9:11-12 NIV, “Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls.”

⁵⁸ 1 Tm 1:9.

⁵⁹ 2 Pt 1:5-11 NIV.

you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Peter says that to confirm ones calling, one has to manifest the fruits of the Spirit. Thus, it may be inferred from the above passage; that one is elected prior to any good work, for there is nothing to confirm when it has not yet been previously bestowed. Thus, election precedes faith and good works. It is with this truth that the Christians ought to exercise their faith, that for whatever reason God has chosen His people, it is His decision to make, it is by His sovereignty that He chooses so; that God is God and whatever He does, He does so out of His wisdom and grace and that to inquire into it would merely frustrate human reasoning, for we cannot fully comprehend the wisdom and ways of God.

Arminians further argue that Jesus' death on the cross was for all humanity, not just the elect. The gist of their argument lies in the valid postulation that it would seem cruel that Jesus would die only for some (those whom God elects) and not for all. A discussion on this will be tackled under the doctrine of limited atonement.

3.4.2.3 *Limited atonement (L)*

We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know His eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that He does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what He denies to others.⁶⁰

Two positions prevail among professing evangelicals on the doctrine of atonement: inconsistent universalism, and particularism (Schwertley, 1998). Inconsistent universalism holds that Christ died for all humanity without exception, but that, only some of those for whom Christ died will actually be save. Inconsistent Universalists (i.e., Arminians) believe that Christ's meritorious work did not actually secure the salvation of anyone, but that, Christ's death was designed to make salvation merely possible for all people. It did not actually secure or guarantee the

⁶⁰ See Inst 3:21:1.

salvation of anyone. It necessitates that fallen human beings, by their faith, will determine whether or not Christ's work will be effective as to individual salvation.

Those who hold to a particular atonement (Calvinists) teach that Christ died for the elect. He died for those who are saved. Christ's atoning death definitely secured the salvation of those for whom He died for. For Calvin⁶¹, election is a source of free mercy. All depend on God and He is the primary cause of salvation. Spurgeon (1988:4:135, sermon 181) defends the Calvinistic perspective:

We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all humanity, or that all humanity would be saved. Now, our reply to this is that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say Christ died for all humanity. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of everyone? They say, "No, certainly not". We ask them the next question – did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of anyone in particular? They answer, 'No'. They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say, "No, Christ has died that anyone may be saved if" – and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon when you say we limit Christ's death; we say, "No my dear sir, it is you that do it". We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no one can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved.

Limited atonement is usually interchanged with "particular redemption" or "definite atonement". These similarly assert that Jesus' substitutionary atonement⁶² was definite and certain in its purpose and in what it accomplished. The word "limited" implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus' death on the cross and not all. It does not however mean that the atonement is limited in its value or power. Calvin⁶³ said that "the atonement is sufficient for all and efficient for the elect." Calvin made it quite plain that he viewed repentance and faith and all

⁶¹ Inst 2:17:1.

⁶² Substitutionary atonement regards Jesus dying as a substitute for others, instead of the sinner, see Salter *Testimony* 451-452; 1 Pt 2:24 says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness;" "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God," v 3:18; and "He was there as our representative, partaking of the nature that was common to us all – a nature under sentence of death because of sin," v 2:24; there is also a less technical use of the term "substitution" in a discussion about atonement when it is used in "the sense that [Jesus, through His death,] did for us that which we can never do for ourselves," see Taylor *The Cross of Christ* 31; Packer 1974 *TB* 3-45 says that "it would – clarify discussion if all who hold that Jesus by dying did something for us which we needed to do but could not, would agree that they are regarding Christ's death as substitutionary, and differing only on the nature of the action which Jesus performed in our place and also, perhaps, on the way we enter into the benefit that flows from it;" "It is possible that Jesus 'bore' or 'carried away' our sins from us not by becoming our substitute, but by becoming our sin offering," see Mattison <http://www.auburn.edu>

⁶³ Inst 3:2.

other procreative benefits of salvation to have been merited only for the elect. What Christ has accomplished on the cross is not so much to secure the salvability of all humanity, as actually to accomplish the salvation of those whom He does redeem (Nicole, 1985:13). This point is contended in Calvin's Institutes (2.17), "Christ rightly and properly merited God's grace and salvation for the elect." Christ's death was designed to actually secure the salvation of all of God's chosen people. Jesus Christ was sent into the world to save those whom the Father had given Him. This is apparent in John 6:35-40 NIV:

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty but as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me that I shall lose none of all those He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

(cf. Jn 10:24-29; Eph 1:3-4; Eph 1:7; Eph 1:13)

Christ's death secured and actually accomplished the salvation of God's chosen people. God has determined that all for whom Christ sacrificed Himself for, will be saved. Christ's death is set forth in the Scripture as that which actually accomplished salvation, not that which merely made salvation possible. This is the unequivocal message of Paul in his first epistle to Timothy 1:15 when he said that Christ came to save sinners. Romans 5:8-10 says that the elect were reconciled to God through Christ's death.⁶⁴ Christ's sacrificial and intercessory work as high priest is for those whom the Father had given Him, not for the whole world. In John 17:2 NIV, Jesus prayed, "'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him.'" In John 17:24 NIV, Jesus said, "Father, I want those You have given me to be with Me where I am." Jesus points out in many instances in the Scripture, that He came to save His people (see Mt 1:21; Eph 5:25-27; Mt 26:28; Heb 9:28), His flock (see Jn 10:11; Jn 10:15; Ac 20:28). This goes to show that Christ's saving work was intended to save those whom the Father gave Him and that those for whom Christ died are an innumerable host from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rv 5:9; Jn 3:16-17; 1 Jn 4:14).

⁶⁴ See also Eph 2:15-16; Col 1:21-22; Gl 3:13; Tt 2:14; Heb 9:12; Lk 19:10.

As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto? Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called to faith in Christ by His spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, to salvation. Neither is any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal spirit, once offered up to God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given Him.⁶⁵

Calvinists affirm that the blood of Christ is sufficient to pay for every single sinner if it were God's intention to save every single human being; that Jesus did not spill a drop of blood in vain (Gl 2:21) and therefore, we can be sure that His blood sufficed for those it was intended for, however many (Mt 26:28) or few (Mt 7:14) they may be. Gill (1980:98; 1987:461-475) stresses that Calvinists also teach that the atonement accomplished certain benefits for the entire human race, but it does not necessarily include eternal salvation for everyone. This doctrine is a coherent incident of God's sovereignty in salvation and of the attribute of atonement.

At the Synod of Dort, both the Arminians and Calvinists agreed that the atonement, brought about by Christ's death, is sufficient to pay for all sins but that it is only efficacious for some, implying that Christ's blood and death on the cross only actually saved some. According to Muller (2012:51-52), the controversy centred on whether this limited efficacy was due to God's election or because of individual choice as proposed by Arminius. The Synod and Reformed theologians however favoured the former.

3.4.2.4 *Irresistible grace (I)*

Irresistible grace is also referred to as "efficacious grace" or "effectual calling."

What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.⁶⁶

Irresistible grace asserts that God's saving grace is effectually applied to those whom He has determined to save (that is, the elect) and which ultimately overcomes the elect's resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, eventually directing them to saving faith.

⁶⁵ See WCF 3:6, 8:5.

⁶⁶ See WSCQ 31.

In his commentary on John 6:44, Calvin (1857:201) said, “We ought not to wonder if many refuse to embrace the gospel; because no man will ever of himself be able to come to Christ, but God must first approach him by His Spirit; and hence it follows that all are not drawn, but that God bestows this grace on those whom He has elected. True, indeed, as to the kind of drawing, it is not violent; so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant.” This means that to those whom God has chosen to reveal the gospel, He also gives the grace to understand and embrace the message through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine holds that this purposeful influence of God’s Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. The Holy Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. Thus, when God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved. This is not to deny the fact that the Spirit’s outward call (through the proclamation and sharing of the gospel) may be, and often is, rejected by sinners; but, it is that inward call by the Holy Spirit which cannot be rejected.

Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV says, “... You [human being] also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit; who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory.” This passage strongly suggests that those who hear the word of God become grafted with Christ and thus receive salvation. The greater question is who may hear the word of God? In John 6:37 NIV, Jesus says, “All those the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.” In John 6:44 NIV, Jesus also says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws them.” Thus, through His sovereign will, God chooses those who may come to Jesus. Those who come to Jesus, He does not drive away. Ultimately, this entails that everyone whom the Father has chosen and for whom Christ died, will certainly experience the application of that salvation through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Under the doctrine of total depravity, we saw that it is only by the enabling of the Holy Spirit that one can understand the salvific message of the gospel. Jesus says in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians 12:3 NIV, “Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Thus, one who has the Holy Spirit can never reject Jesus for it is by the Holy Spirit that one may understand the beauty and the necessity of coming to the knowledge and salvation of Christ. It is also by the Spirit that we are transformed into Christ-likeness. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Thomas (1965:63) says that the “doctrine of irresistible grace is entirely consonant with the lofty conception of God. In the salvation of human beings, He [God] is not just one of a chain of causes, but the cause; if there is a chain of causation, any action of human beings can be designated only as a ‘contingent’ cause. God initiates the process, determines the means, and works invincibly through to the end.” God not only allows His chosen people to hear the word, but He also assures that they be saved through the acceptance of the gospel message and the surrender to a godly life which can only be possible through the conviction of the Holy Spirit; when God chooses to show His mercy and grace to the elect whether through predetermined pain on their lives so that they see their need of God and thus come to God or through the preaching of the word of God which irresistibly draws them to salvation. There is therefore no resisting God’s grace and salvation when God chooses to grant it.

The Calvinistic perspective is summed up into what is called the Monergistic argument where the Holy Spirit regenerates every one of God’s chosen people and enables them to believe. The Westminster Confession of Faith (Williamson, 1964:5) provides:

All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

Warfield (2003:359) and Sproul (1986:72-73; 2005:188) agree that the Monergistic doctrine is the heart of Calvinistic theology – the Holy Spirit graciously regenerates every one of God’s chosen people, creating within them a new heart and enabling them to freely and willingly believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Warren (2009:551) observes that the evident distinction between Calvinism and Arminianism is whether faith precedes or follows regeneration. Barrett (2011:2) wrote, “Whether or not regeneration precedes faith and is accomplished by God’s sovereign will alone (monergism) or is conditioned upon man’s faith, requiring man’s free will cooperation for its efficacy (synergism) continues to be one of the most important divisions between the Calvinist and the Arminian today.”

For Calvinists, spiritual regeneration is an inward change in a person performed solely by the Holy Spirit and is not dependent upon human help or cooperation. Romans 9:16 NIV says, “It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” Steele and Thomas (1963:48-49) explained this inward and irresistible calling by the Holy Spirit:

Therefore, the Holy Spirit, in order to bring God’s elect to salvation, extends to them a special inward call in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinners which inevitably brings them to faith in Christ.

Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His [Spirit’s] work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit’s call and of God’s grace in saving sinners as being “efficacious,” “invincible,” or “irresistible.” For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!

Hence, the new birth precedes and makes possible saving faith. Life gives faith. This is a stark contrast to what Arminians believe as synergism. Olson (2009:18) describes synergism as that affirming “the prevenience of grace to every human exercise of a good will towards God, including simple non-resistance to the saving work of Christ.” Arminians believe that the Holy Spirit cannot regenerate sinners until after they believe. The initial faith response of a person is a prerequisite to whether or not the Holy Spirit will work for the sinner’s salvation. Faith therefore precedes the new birth. Arminius (1956:497) says:

All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him [God] who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of the elect and of the reprobate.

Barrett (2011:4), in what he calls God-initiated synergism, explains that although Arminius believed that a person is totally depraved, God provides a universal prevenient grace whereby human depravity is mitigated and the human will is enabled to cooperate with God's grace. Arminians such as Philip Limborch, Jack Cottrell, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark Pinnock believe that while sin did in fact defile human beings, we are still able to exercise our free will and respond to God's prompting in order to either accept or reject God's grace. This is what Barrett (2011:4) calls "human-initiated synergism."

To this Calvin⁶⁷ responds:

But perhaps there will be some who, while they admit that the will is in its own nature averse to righteousness, and is converted solely by the power of God, will yet hold that, when once it is prepared, it performs a part in acting. This they found upon the words of Augustine, that grace precedes every good work; the will accompanying, not leading; a handmaid, and not a guide.

For Calvin, righteousness is solely authored by God and repentance and faith are divine gifts which are the result, not the cause, of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. In Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV, God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws." God shows that He intends to save His people and not merely to make them salvable. Because of sin, human will is corrupted, that if left in its own state, will always reject God; therefore, God chose to save the elect without any pre-condition on our part. God then atoned for human sin in order to bestow the blessings of salvation and eternal life to the elect (limited atonement). The Holy Spirit then applies this salvation and grace to the elect by regenerating their spirits and drawing them into salvation (irresistible grace). This was shown in Acts 16:14 NIV, when a woman heard the word of God and accepted the gospel message, "One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth ...The Lord opened her heart to respond to

⁶⁷ Inst 2:3:7, 1559.

Paul's message." Deuteronomy 30:6 NIV says, "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts ... so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live."

In Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV, Paul says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Salvation being a gift initiated, completed and bestowed by God, is in accordance to His sovereignty and His overwhelming grace and love for us. To believe then that we had any input to our own salvation steals the glory that ought to be God's alone. Calvin⁶⁸ strongly emphasized this in a lengthy discussion in the Institutes, in substance thus:

The beginning of right will and action being of faith, we must see whence faith itself is. But since the Scripture proclaims throughout that it is the free gift of God, it follows, that when human beings, who are with their whole soul naturally prone to evil, begin to have a good will, it is owing to mere grace. Therefore ... nothing good can proceed from our will until it be formed again, and that after it is formed again in so far as it is good, it is of God, and not of us.

Calvin reputed human cooperation in any way against the work of God's grace. He insists rather, that the corrupt will is erased and replaced with a will that is entirely God's. Thereby, allowing one to live a godly life made possible only by the effectuating grace of God. The Westminster Confession of Faith (Assembly, 1646, 5.1.2) reflects Calvin's view:

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving to them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in human being, who is altogether passive therein, until, being made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he [human being] is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

3.4.2.5 *Perseverance of the saints (P)*

The perseverance of the saints⁶⁹ is founded upon the sovereign will of God which cannot be frustrated by human act or by anything else apart from God. For Calvin, salvation is purely of

⁶⁸ Inst 2:3:6-14, 1559.

⁶⁹ Or perseverance of God with the saints; the word "saints" in this doctrine refers to all who are set apart by God or the "elect," see Spencer *TULIP* 63.

the grace of God even faith in Christ is made strong only by and through Him [God]. In his writings, Calvin⁷⁰ said:

Therefore, while we all labour naturally under the same disease, those only recover health to whom the Lord is pleased to put forth His healing hand. The others, whom, in just judgement, He passes over, pine and rot away till they are consumed. And this is the only reason why some persevere to the end, and others, after beginning their course, fall away. Perseverance is the gift of God, which He does not lavish promiscuously on all, but imparts to whom He pleases. If it is asked how the difference arises – why some steadily persevere, and others prove deficient in steadfastness, we can give no other reason than that the Lord, by His mighty power, strengthens and sustains the former, so that they perish not, while He does not furnish the same assistance to the latter, but leaves them to be monuments of instability.

Because of God's omnipotence, those whom God has called into communion with Him will continue in faith until the end. All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit are eternally saved. In the first epistle of John 2:25, God promises His children eternal life. In John 6:51 NIV, Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever." Calvinists believe that God is faithful even when we are faithless and anybody that is unconditionally elected by God and irresistibly drawn to Him, the atonement of Christ is absolutely for them. Jesus says in John 6:47 NIV, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life." Calvinists argue that since God grants the elect eternal life, if the believer could be lost, then it could not be said that believer ever really possessed eternal life. This concept is also widely known as the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. The Westminster Confession of Faith (17.1) thus says: "They, whom God hath accepted in His beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

Steele and Thomas (1963:56) succinctly define this doctrine as "the Biblical doctrine that God infallibly preserves in faith those all He has given to the Son." In John 10:27-29 NIV, Jesus says, "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

⁷⁰ Inst 2:5:3.

Berkhof (1953:546) stressed however, that this perseverance of the saints does not necessitate that all those who profess the Christian faith are certain of heaven. They are the saints – those who are set apart by the Spirit – who persevere to the end. They are the believers – those who are given true, living faith in Christ – who are secure and safe in Him.

And what of those who fall away; those who commit sin or backslide from the faith? Does God’s choosing of the elect preclude the elect from committing sin or doing wrong? Steele and Thomas (1963:56) explained, “Many who profess to believe fall away, but they do not fall from grace for they were never in grace. True believers do fall into temptations, and they do commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to lose their salvation or separate them from Christ.”

Spencer (2002:63) posits “since no condition in man determine his being chosen (unconditional election), it stands to reason that there is nothing he can do to get himself ‘unsaved’ once he has been saved by God’s grace.” The same power which justified the elect is also at work in the continued sanctification of that believer. The Holy Spirit continuously operates in the believer, to which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart is continued and brought to completion. Paul writes in Philippians 1:6 NIV, “I am sure of this that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” It is because God never forsakes His work that believers continue to stand to the very end. Calvin⁷¹ wrote:

I answer, that the grace which they call accepting, is nothing else than the free goodness with which the Father embraces us in Christ when He clothes us with the innocence of Christ, and accepts it as ours, so that in consideration of it He regards us as holy, pure and innocent. For the righteousness of Christ (as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand the scrutiny of God) must be listed for us, and as a surety represent us judicially ... Our imperfection and purity, covered with this purity, are not imputed, but are as it were buried, so as not to come under judgment until the hour arrive when the old man being destroyed, and plainly extinguished in us, the divine goodness shall receive us into beatific peace with the new Adam, there to await the day of the Lord, on which, being clothed with incorruptible bodies, we shall be translated to the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Since it is Christ who saves the elect from sin and not of their own works, it follows that through Christ’s finished work on the cross, they will maintain to be saved. While the elect may

⁷¹ See Inst 3:12:12, 1884.

do wrong, their salvation and election is neither affected by what they do (unconditional election) – neither by the good works⁷² nor the wrongs they commit. However, God has for the elect the Holy Spirit to teach them His ways and to straighten their paths, although these human works do not add to nor lessen the finished work of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the elect ones continue on with their walk with God. The Westminster Confession of Faith (17.2) states:

This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own freewill, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

Steele and Thomas (1963:56) wrote, “The elect are not only redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit; they are also kept in faith by the almighty power of God. All those who are spiritually united to Christ through regeneration are eternally secure in Him. Nothing can separate them from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. They have been predestined unto eternal glory and are therefore assured of heaven.” Those who truly are of God can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace but will persevere in their faith to the end. God gives the elect the grace and strength to continue living the godly life. While Calvinists acknowledge that the elect, at times will fall into sin, they hold that a real believer in Christ cannot surrender his or her personal faith to the dominion of sin.

But what if the believer persists on sinning? Calvinists believe that those who apparently fall away or those who keep on sinning never really had true faith to begin with. The first epistle of John 2:19 NIV says, “They did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” If they are truly saved but not presently walking in the Spirit, they will be divinely chastened and will eventually repent. Paul⁷³ shows us that God indeed chastens His children:

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His

⁷² Is 64:6 says that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

⁷³ Heb 12:5-11.

children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Calvinists believe that whether you are increasingly sanctified or not, you will be saved because of the perfect and finished work of Christ on the cross. God gives the elect grace to carry through with their faith. Jesus says in John 17:12 NIV, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” Still, in the same tenor, the first epistle of John 5:18 NIV testifies, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one that was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.”

Berkhof (1953:546) explains that many who profess to believe may eventually fall away, but they do not in fact fall from grace for they were never really in grace. True believers may indeed fall into temptations, and may commit grievous sins, but these do not cause them to lose their salvation nor do they separate the elect from Christ. This does not also mean that the believer is countenanced to continue on sinning. The Holy Spirit enables the elect to change his or her ways in order to conform to God’s. The Spirit gives the believer true faith in Christ which will always lead to a changed life. Calvinists believe that those who continue on sinning were never really elected nor saved to begin with. The first epistle of John 3:6-9 NIV says:

No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

God will not allow His children to fall away.⁷⁴ Instead, He chastens them and restores them rightly. God delivers the elect from sin through the power of the Holy Spirit working in them, leading the elect to live a godly and changed life. The first epistle of Peter 5:10 NIV tells us that

⁷⁴ Heb 5:11-6:12.

“the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

The Calvinist concept of the preservation of the saints is contrasted with the Arminian theology of the conditional preservation or security of which that the believers are kept safe by God in their saving relationship with Him upon the condition of a persevering faith in Christ (Arminius, 1996:465-466; Ellis, 2005:77-78, 112-113). Arminians believe that all who are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep their faith or by falling into a state of serious sin. Picirilli (2002:123-125) defended the Arminian view, saying that if a believer becomes an unbeliever, she or he necessarily ceases to partake of the promises of salvation and eternal life made to believers who continue in faith and remain united to Christ.

As a response against Arminianism, another group, the Antinomians⁷⁵ was formed. Antinomians pushed the Calvinistic doctrine to a more extreme end, asserting that all who make a profession of faith are eternally secure, whether or not they keep up their faith. This perspective was branded as “Easy Believism.”⁷⁶ Antinomians taught that no corresponding need exists for a committed life of Christian discipleship as proof of salvation. Determining the difference of the Antinomian view and that of Calvinists, Constant (1978:29) argued that *Sola Fide* does not mean a Christian life without growth, “True faith in Christ will always lead to a changed life.” William (2010:196) too, saw the danger of Antinomianism and argued that “if one merely preaches on the unmerited favour of God and the fulfilled stipulations of the covenant of Christ, then there is a tendency to lull human beings into sleep in a carnal security. Despite the grace of God, believers still ought to be challenged to show their faith by their works. It must be pressed that while faith alone saves, it can never be a faith that is alone. [It must be guided] in such a way as to direct the minds of the sinner to the fountain of holiness, Jesus Christ. He

⁷⁵ Those who believe the principle of salvation by faith and divine grace, asserting that the saved are not bound to follow the Law of Moses, see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

⁷⁶ Easy Believism is a somewhat derogatory term used by opponents of the view that one needs only to believe in Jesus in order to be saved; “Easy Believism is a modern form of the ancient heresy of Antinomianism; it asserts that once a person makes a decision for Christ or prays to receive Jesus as Saviour, it is not necessary to embrace Him as Lord – there are no requirements of law that bind the Christian,” see Sproul *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* 13.

alone is the source of justification and holiness. Works only confirm assurance; they do not produce or act as basis for assurance". The second epistle of Peter 1:10 NIV reads, "Make every effort to confirm your calling and election, for if you do these things, you will never stumble." In his commentary to Romans, Calvin⁷⁷ said:

There is in life or in death, which seems capable of tearing us away from God, shall effect nothing; nay, the very angels, were they to attempt to overturn this foundation, shall do us no harm ... we ought not to fear, lest the continuance of evils, however long, should obliterate the faith of adoption. Calvin is strongly convicted that the elect will never fall away, no matter the reason. He adds, but we, on the contrary, ought to feel confident, that He, who has begun in us a good work, will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus.

Ryrie (1997:16), in his writings, stressed that grace is not at all cheap, although free to the recipient; it is costly to the donor. While God freely chooses those whom He will call His children, such knowledge must also be underpinned on the principle that faith in Jesus, enabled by the Holy Spirit, will ultimately lead to a progressively changed life, one that eventually heeds to a Christian life. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

3.5 Conclusion

Salvation, as held by the members of the Synod, is a work of Christ's grace from beginning to end: "Therefore all human beings are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation."⁷⁸ In no sense did the Synod believe that the sinners saved themselves or contributed to their salvation. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden had completely ruined the human race. All were by nature spiritually dead and are bandaged to sin and of this world. Calvin⁷⁹ said that the ability to believe the gospel was itself a gift from God, bestowed only upon those whom God had chosen to be the objects of His unmerited favour. To allow a deeper appreciation of God's grace means to believe that it is God who independently determined to show mercy to sinners and usher

⁷⁷ Comm on Rm 8:28.

⁷⁸ CD 3rd and 4th head: art 3.

⁷⁹ See Calvin *Acts of the Council of Trent with its Antidote* 110.

humanity in the gift of salvation. In his commentary to Ephesians 2:8, Calvin remarked that “faith (of which nothing connected to it is our own), then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ. And so, he adds, not of anyone; that claiming nothing for themselves, they may acknowledge God alone as the author of their salvation”. Selderhuis (ed. *et al.*, 2009:321) summarizes Calvin’s writings thus:

[First] we can approach God only in humility. We can only be in awe of His greatness, since it is beyond human understanding. Clearly, a reference to God’s eternal counsel prior to the foundation of the world is dropped; it is not even mentioned. Second, God’s mercy is so great that we can only comprehend it soteriologically. Hence “elected” means that He has pulled us out of the general condemnation of the human race caused by Adam’s fall and led us to our Lord Christ. The phrase “in Him” (Eph 1:4) means through His election. Third, condemnation is mentioned, but its cause is not discussed. Rather, the argumentation is on personal level: we would have been the condemned if God had not made His goodness available to us and had not separated us from the condemned. There are condemned people, but they are not the subject under discussion – we are. Fourth, sanctification absolutely follows upon election. We are not worthy, but God makes us more “acceptable” as we were previously.

TULIP served as a powerful representation of the defence for the Reformed theology of grace. Calvin toiled to support and roots his theology of grace in Scripture. The TULIP insisted on following Pauline corpus in its presentation of the message of God’s grace in Scripture, as in Ephesians 2:8-9, which provided the requisites of salvation⁸⁰ and stressed a salvation by grace (2:8a), not of human doing (2:8b-9). Calvinists reaffirmed that the exercise of human free will whether to choose or reject salvation, is inconsistent with what Paul taught in Ephesians and in the rest of his Epistles.

It will seem strange to contemporary thinkers that the Synod of Dort rejected as heretical the five doctrines advanced by the Arminians, considering that these doctrines had gained wide acceptance in the modern church. Pinnock (1989:15) observed, “A theological shift is underway among evangelicals as well as other Christians. This trend began because of a fresh and faithful reading of the Bible in dialogue with modern culture, which places emphasis on autonomy, temporality, and historical change.” It is interesting to note that although Arminianism was instituted as a response to Calvinism, it seems that it is the Calvinists who are now on defence of their faith against the increasing number of Arminian believers today. The ranks of contemporary popular Arminians include Billy Graham, Charles Finney, Rick Warren, Dwight

⁸⁰ See Hoehner *Ephesians* 497-817.

Moody, Watchman Nee, John Rice, among others distributed to most Wesleyan, Pentecostal and Catholic churches. The Arminians seemed to have gained leverage as their theology found favour in the principles embraced by modernity such as individualism, humanism, self-empowerment and a general accent on the human being, a far cry from what the Christian communities then professed.

Still evident, is the fact that Calvin has a strong impact in Christian thought. His teachings have become interesting and contentious concepts in theology that inevitably, it aroused controversies but also gathered a huge following of devotees. Although there was an initial effort to settle the disparate views against Calvinism and thus reconcile the debates, until now, and even more so, there is an expanding debate surrounding Paul's writings on grace. The debate is no longer binary, between the Calvinists and the Arminians, especially because arguments from various faith sources have sprung up from as many religions, sects and individuals as there are. Although pejorative to a fault, these debates on grace indicate the centrality of God's personality in the story of the salvation of sinners. Undeniably, grace is a fundamental attribute to the person of God – to who He is, although grace is not all that God is. Grace, however, allowed the unqualified to enter into the knowledge of God and to the experience of Him. Although doubts have been cast as to the true intentional meaning of Paul in his letters, there is no doubt that God's grace has closed the gap between the human and God and thus saved the elect from eternal damnation. Indeed, it is but God's grace that Christ willingly and lovingly spread His arms on the cross and suffered the pangs brought about by the filth of sinners.

CHAPTER 4

THE GRACE DEBATE

4.1 Introduction

In the immediate previous chapter, we have seen that despite having the Scripture as the one ultimate source of the doctrine of grace, and irrespective of the countless study aiming to analyse the implications of the message of grace, there have been, throughout history, continuous and augmentative clashes on certain points of the grace doctrine. We have seen the contentions of the Arminians against the Reformed perspective which is summarized into the TULIP. Although the TULIP is but a fragment of the Reformed theology, it is however, a cardinal dogma of the Reformists. Since the conception of the disputes on the grace doctrine, the issues raised then have found their way into contemporary Christian churches and have branched out into more complex questions and issues which are dividing churches into clashing sects and even strengthening anti-Christian sentiments. The debate is no longer between the Reformists against the Arminians but has become more protracted within and outside the faith groups. Not only is it more convoluted, but the views have even become more dynamic, due in part to the advent of technology and to the faster conveyance of information and communication, allowing a broader participation and a wider avenue for discussion on diverse topics; including issues on theology and faith – God’s grace being an inevitable theme in faith discourses (see “The Reformation resurgence”⁸¹ exposing the alleged dangers of Arminianism; and, “What’s wrong with Calvinism”⁸² criticizing the Reformed teachings). The free space provided by various media has advanced the quality of engagement on the subject matter, such that the grace doctrine has become vulnerable to opinions, allowing individual imposition of meanings and implications. These individual opinions, when circulated, evoke other “opinions” and generate a market of subjectively coloured interpretations. In a world where everyone has a voice, and all insist to be heard, the truth may be side-lined in the claim of everyone to be right. In the same way, where

⁸¹ Supported by the Ligonier Ministries a reformed group of social media bloggers, see Reformation Resurgence 2017 <https://www.facebook.com>

⁸² Written by Jerry Walls, a defender of Wesleyan-Arminianism, see Walls 2013 <http://www.evangel.edu>

all groups insist on the truth of their faith, the Scripture's message is silenced into oblivion by the noise of loud opinions and deafening thoughts on grace, which, as we have pointed out in the previous chapter, is what the Bible has warned us against. The Scripture reminds us to handle the gospel message with utmost faithfulness by staying true to its meaning – that which ought to be in accordance to the author's intended meaning and not the reader's.

Although grace has been central in Christian dogmatic discourses since Luther and Calvin, it has become even more interesting in contemporary theology with the rise of, what most refer to as the "Grace-revolution." For instance, Olson's (2011) book entitled "Against Calvinism," presents a contemporary defence of evangelical Arminianism against the book "For Calvinism" by Horton (2011a). Horton's book conforms to the Calvinistic theology of grace and likewise defends against the contentions of Olson in his book. The Passion movement by Giglio (2011), in his preaching entitled "We Will Carry the Name," criticizes Piper (a famous contemporary Calvinist) as being "99% Calvinistic on grace but seeking for 1% more", this implies that debate is occurring not only outside the Reformed tradition but also inside the Reformed church as well. Contestants nit-pick and segregate the teachings most convenient to them or are in complete opposition against the totality of another's theology.

Horton (2011b:15) observed that most objections to, and attacks against Calvinism, focus on the "Five Points of Calvinism," conveniently called the doctrines of grace and remembered through the mnemonic "TULIP." The five points summarize the Canons of Dort (see Sproul, 2005:27-28). Although the origins of the five points and the acronym are uncertain, they appear to be outlined in the counter Remonstrance of 1611, a less known Reformed reply to the Arminians that occurred prior to the Canons of Dort (DeJong, 1968:52-58). The acronym was used by McAfee as early as circa 1905 (Wail, 1913:104). An early printed appearance of the TULIP acronym is in Boettner's (2015:45-140) book, "The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination." According to Stewart (2008:189-193) the acronym was very cautiously used by Calvinist apologists and theologians before the booklet "The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented" by Steele and Thomas (1963) was published. In response to

criticisms, Reformed theologians have since sought to reformulate the TULIP acronym to more accurately reflect the Canons of Dort.⁸³

This chapter of the study aims to comprehensively but substantially present the contentious issues and questions gleaned from the arguments thrown against the Reformed perspective on grace (TULIP).

4.2 Human total depravity

As discussed in chapter 3, the theology of total depravity was hugely influenced by Augustine's teachings on the condition of human beings who are corrupted because of the original sin (Cross & Livingstone, 2005:1203). Augustine (1953:219, 381) says that although we are willing to choose to do good, we cannot actually do so because it is not in our nature to do what is good due to the deserts of the original sin. Total depravity essentially implies that we are completely independently incapable of following God. That human-will will always choose the ways of sin because it is its nature to do so.

To analyse this principle and the arguments against it, we have to refer back to the genesis of when sin entered God's creation, when Adam fell to sin in the Garden of Eden. The condition of human beings after the fall of the first man to sin will entail what is required to have us redeemed from the consequences of sin.

4.2.1 Human condition after the fall (Pelagius versus Augustine)

In Church history, the thrust to the study of the fall of human beings started from Pelagius and gradually to Augustine. They are notably the two streams of thought on the studies of original sin⁸⁴. Reformers were hugely influenced by Augustine's works. Warfield (1905:126) wrote, "It is Augustine who gave us the Reformation." Augustine had a huge impact on the Reformation

⁸³ See Montgomery and Jones *PROOF* 8-9 (the authors of *PROOF* offer a reformulated acronym to communicate the positive achievements of Dort and the Reformed doctrines of grace; *PROOF* stands for Planned Grace, Resurrecting Grace, Outrageous Grace, Overcoming Grace, and Forever Grace).

⁸⁴ There are other theories from other people beyond Pelagianism, but they are non-Christians which automatically disqualifies their viewpoints as a basis for this study.

fathers. Luther himself was an Augustinian monk. Calvin, in his writings, often quoted Augustine. Sproul (1996:2) wrote that the Reformation's roots were "planted by Augustine".

Pelagius' perspective dealt matter-of-factly with Christian tradition (cf. Gore, 2016). Pelagius (cited by Rees, 1991:36-37) contended that original sin did not dent human nature and that human beings are still capable of "choosing good" without special divine aid, although he conceded that human good works were assisted, merely, by God's grace. Pelagius remarked:

It was because God wished to bestow on the rational creatures the gift of doing good of their own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice, by implanting in human beings the possibility of choosing either alternative ... They could not claim to possess the good of their own volition, unless they were the kind of creatures that could also have possessed evil. Our most excellent Creator wished us to be able to do either but actually to do only one, that is, "good," which He also commanded, giving us the capacity to do evil only so that we might do His will by exercising our own. That being so, this very capacity to do evil is also good – good, I say, because it makes the good part better by making it voluntary and independent, not bound by necessity but free to decide for itself.

(Rees, 1991:36-37)

Contrary to this, Augustine (2010:262) held that Adam's sin had been transmitted to his descendants; that being hereditary, a defiled nature comes to the soul and body of the new person by reason of the original sin. Augustine added, "All human beings, consequently, without a single exception, were dead through sin, original sin."

These two clashing viewpoints have become important, if not, controlling, in soteriological discussions. Fundamental in both perspectives is the evident manifestation of the importance of God's grace in human salvation, which commenced when Adam ate the fruit from the tree of good and evil forbidden by God and that if the fruit be eaten, death will follow (Gn 2:16-17). How did God show His grace to human beings even in the garden? Cortez (2012) wrote, "What did the almighty God of the universe do when His creatures sinned against Him? He searched for them, He found them, and He spoke to them (Gn 3:9). God spoke; 'And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them' (Gn 3:21). He does not leave them in their shame and nakedness, but He provides a covering. God provided; 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' (Gn 3:15). God promised. He promised that He will send someone who will strike back against the sin and evil that threatened His creation, His people,

and His plan.” And true enough, Jesus, died on the cross crushing the throngs of sin that human beings may be saved once and for all. Indeed, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of good and evil, God still showed His grace to them.

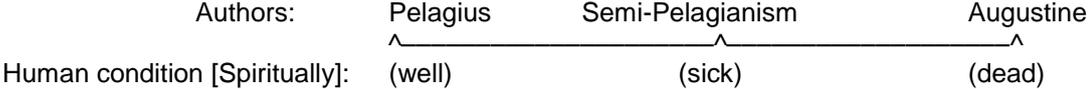
After Pelagius and Augustine, other views branched out of these views, one is Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism is a compromise of both Pelagius’ thesis and of Augustine’s. Semi-Pelagianism held that (1) grace is the external prerequisite for salvation (Augustinian view). Grace as an external prerequisite means nobody can be saved without it; (2) however, grace is not necessary to make a start toward salvation (Pelagian view); (3) predestination is understood in light of prescience (Augustinian view) or God’s foreknowledge of a person’s future actions or decisions; and, (4) those who cooperate with grace are saved, others who choose not to, will be lost (cf. Gore, 2016). To Semi-Pelagianism, the human race is sick, but not entirely dead. Weber (1988: essay 1) wrote that salvation means being liberated from sickness; that spiritual health is salvation, spiritual health that we can either accept or reject (Bellah, 1999:277-304).

It is important to understand the state of human condition pre-salvation to realize and appreciate the significance of God’s grace in the salvation message. Hence, if the human is spiritually well, healthy, sick, or dead, how important is God’s grace? Why did God have to send His only begotten Son?

The following illustrates the spectrum where the three perspectives on human condition before salvation lie (this will also be alluded to in chapter 6 of this study):

Figure 3

The three perspectives on human condition pre-salvation



4.2.2 *Against total depravity: God's sovereignty versus human free will*

The issues involved in this principle vitally affect the Christian's concepts of God, of sin, and of human salvation. Packer (1926:4-5), in contrasting the Calvinistic and Arminian dogmas, is certainly correct in asserting that the difference between the two is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables human beings to save themselves. The Arminian rejection of the Reformed concept of total depravity is the most contentious on the matter.

Calvinism presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the deliverance of the lost sinner – election by the Father, redemption by the Son, and calling by the Spirit directed towards the sinners, and securing human salvation infallibly. Arminianism, on the other hand, gives each act a different orientation; the object of redemption being humanity; of calling, those who hear the gospel; and of election, the hearers who respond. Vital to this, is the Arminians' denial that salvation is secured by any of the three. The two theologies thus conceived the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on God's work, the other on human work; one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as human contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory to God, the other divides the praise between God, who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and human being, who by believing, operated it. These differences are important. The evident value of the "Five Points," as a summary of Calvinism, is that they make clear the points and the extent to which these two conflicting concepts are at variance.

Walls (2016:3-28), by defending the Wesleyan-Arminian view on free will, accused the Calvinists and the Reformed theologians of advocating a god who does not love the whole world and a god who violated his own nature of love. He quoted that the real issue on this debate is not about human free moral agency, nor is it biblical authority, nor is it the issue of whether God is fully sovereign; rather, Walls contend that the debate centres on an issue about God's character. Who is God? What does His plan of salvation reflect to His character and nature? Does God truly love (all) the world as provided in John 3:16? Is His love absolute? If salvation is not for everyone, does it mean that His love is not for everyone? The answers to

these questions seemingly lead to the conclusion that the Calvinistic God is a tyrant and that the God of the Arminians is a lover of all.

Although the Arminians conceded to the doctrine of human depravity, they however qualified its characterization unlike that of Calvin's (Peterson & Williams, 2004:163). Arminians affirm that human nature was seriously affected by the original sin; they contend that we are not at all left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. Arminius (1853:iii) wrote:

This is my opinion concerning the free will of man: in his primitive condition as he came out of the hands of his Creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform the true good, according to the commandment delivered to him. Yet none of these acts could he do, except through the assistance of divine grace. But in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that they may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration or renovation, I consider that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing that which is good, but yet not without the continued aids of divine grace.

Wesley (1986:206-207) too believed that human beings are "dead in trespass and sins." Olson (2009:150), in defending the Arminian view, wrote that Arminians affirm the bondage of the human will to sin in a manner reminiscent of Luther and Calvin. Olson also warned against the lumping of Arminian theology with Semi-Pelagianism. Olson (2009:154) argues that the "moral ability to respond to the gospel freely ... is a free gift of God through Christ to all people in some measure." Arminians hold that the Holy Spirit influences human will towards the good. Olson explained that through this influence "the deadly wound of Adam's sin is being healed." But in the same argument, Olson also noted that human beings are not however, fully renewed, that the "fallen nature is still with them [human beings]." He further argues that "no person is left by God entirely in that [fallen] state of nature without neither some measure of grace to rise above it, if he cooperates with grace by not resisting it." He argues that unlike Calvinism however, everyone is given this "prevenient grace" which enables one to will to choose God. He questioned the Calvinistic theology that God preselects those who will be saved. Olson (2009:154) wrote:

The only question is whether Christians are preselected by God out of the mass of others (who have no hope and no chance to respond to the gospel because God has chosen to pass over them and not give them the gift of irresistible grace) or whether they have responded freely to the gospel because they made use of the gift of prevenient grace extended to all. If [Calvinists] are

right, God's heart is totally closed to all, but the elect and the rest of humanity is never given the ability to hear and respond to the gospel. What kind of God is it who glorifies Himself that way?

While both Arminianism and Calvinism agree that human beings are deeply affected by sin, the extent to which sin devours the human being draws the variance between these two faiths. Maddox (1994:55-56) wrote that "the fundamental difference between [Wesley] and his Calvinist opponents really lies more in their respective understandings of the nature of God than in their evaluation of human situation." In Calvinism, we see a God who steps in and consumes the being of sinners, giving them a new will and a new heart through the Holy Spirit. While in Arminianism, we see a God who provides enough grace so that we can have enough faith to believe, but ultimately, we are not consumed by this grace, we are but influenced – we can either cooperate with God's Spirit or resist God's grace and perish, either way, in both separate scenarios, we cannot reconcile the two characteristics into one God – it is either that He consumes humans to the fullest with His grace or that He allows a cooperation between human will and His – each is mutually exclusive.

4.3 Divine predestination in redemption: free will versus election

The principal difficulty concerning the doctrine of predestination (which can be found in Eph 1:4, 5, 11; Rm 8:28-30; 2 Th 2:13; Ac 2:23, and Ac 13:48) centres on the controversy between the advocates of the human free will (free moral agency) as opposed to the advocates of deterministic foreordination and predestination of human beings (i.e., those who stress that both the saved and the lost were "elected" before the foundation of the world).⁸⁵

Kearley (2008:1) wrote that "the view of deterministic predestination and foreordination has affected Christianity most profoundly over the past five centuries." Calvin⁸⁶ defined predestination as that "divine will that those whom God admits to be heirs of His kingdom are exempted from universal destruction." Even until today, these views are highly criticized by Evangelicals or Arminians. They strongly opposed this deterministic view of Calvin and forwarded

⁸⁵ This conflict has had a long history (for a brief review, it is best to consult Lindsay 1939 *ISBE* 2435-2437).

⁸⁶ Inst 3:33:10.

the principles of free will and stressed on the free moral agency of every person in the salvation narrative.

Like divine sovereignty, predestination is not originally Calvin's. Calvin and his followers insisted that it is rather a biblical doctrine, a Pauline corpus, as can be read in Romans 8:29-30 NIV, "For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified." Here, Paul operationalizes salvation in terms of God foreknowing His people, predestining them, calling them, justifying and glorifying them.

As a theologian steeped in the Scripture, Wesley (1856:29, 30-38), in defence of Arminianism, not only denied the Calvinistic thesis but fervidly countered it. He chose for his sermon "on predestination" the same classic text dealing with this great biblical truth – Romans 8:29-30, in which Wesley said that some have understood the text as a "chain of causes and effects." He argues that the passage simply provides "the order in which the several branches of salvation constantly flow from each other." Wesley also insisted on a doctrine of predestination, however, it is distinctly different from Calvinism. Wesley captured the heart of his view:

God decrees from everlasting to everlasting that all who believe in the Son of His love shall be conformed to His image, shall be saved from all inward and outward sin into all inward and outward holiness ... and this in virtue of the unchangeable, irreversible, irresistible decree of God: "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."

Notice that Wesley wrote that God has decreed from eternity those who will be saved: those who believe in Jesus. His eternal decree, moreover, is irreversible and irresistible. God sets the terms of salvation and those terms are unalterable. There is therefore no other way to be saved. God has decreed that those who believe in Jesus are predestined to be conformed to His image, to become holy, through and through, like Jesus. Walls (2016:66-67) also explained:

Predestination is like a train that has a predetermined destination. All who board the train and remain on it will inevitably arrive at that predetermined destination. Moreover, there is no other way to reach that destination. If we want to make it there, we have to get on that train, and remain on it through each of the stops along the way. The train is firmly on the track, and the driver is capable and determined to bring all passengers who are aboard to the predetermined destination. The predetermined destination is heaven. It is holiness, it is being like Jesus. And the only way we can get there is to believe in Jesus. In fact, we might even say that Jesus is the train. The call of God invites us to board the train. If we exercise faith in Christ, we are "in Christ"

as Paul puts it. And all who are “in Christ” are on the way to the predestined end so long as they stay on the train. Those who are called to believe, to “come aboard,” may choose not to do so, and if they decide they do not want to be made holy like Jesus, they may exit the train at one of its stops along the way.

Here we see a parting of the Wesleyan view of predestination and the Calvinist view – by asking the question as to who can get in the train. The Wesleyan answer is that everyone is not only invited and called to get in, but that God also gives everyone the grace that enables them to actually get in. If they do not get in, or if they choose to get off before the train reaches its final destination, it is because of their own free choice. By contrast, the Calvinist would say that only certain persons are chosen by God to be saved, and while all are called or invited into boarding the train, only the elect are given the grace to come and actually board it; that those who are elected are called in such a way that they cannot refuse the invitation, the elect will eventually get in the train. The Westminster Confession of Faith (5.1) describes this special call:

All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by grace.

Compare this statement with Wesley’s (1831:44) description of how God extends His grace to fallen sinners:

To reclaim these, God uses all manner of ways; He tries every avenue of their souls. He applies sometimes to their understanding, showing them the folly of their sins; sometimes to their affections, tenderly exhorting with them for their ingratitude, and even condescending to ask, “What could I have done for you (consistent with my eternal purpose, not to force you) whom I have not done?”

Both the above-quoted statements describe how God influences us by reaching out to our thoughts, our emotions and our wills. The crucial question between the two faiths is up to what extent God calls the elect into salvation. As the Calvinist sees it, God determines those He has chosen to enter into salvation. He acts upon them in such a way that He changes their thoughts, gives them a new heart, and renews their will. As a result, they are determined to come to Christ, and yet they “come most freely”. Calvinists claim that freedom and determinism are fully compatible. For the Calvinist, freedom means that God causes us to have the thoughts, feelings, and desires, that as a result, we decide exactly the way God has caused us to, but that we are free because we come to “want” what God caused us to do and decide. We cannot will

to do otherwise, but we still do what we want to do because God has not determined us to act against our will. God determines us to act in accordance with the desires He has caused us to have (further discussion on this will continue on the following section).

Wesley insisted otherwise. He argued that true freedom is not compatible with determinism (Walls & Dongell, 2004:218). For Wesley, God calls us, reasons with us, shows us the truth but He will not determine our choices, for what He really wants from us is true love, worship and obedience. And in Wesley's view, these require that God cannot determine our choices. God predestines the means and the end of salvation alone and not our thoughts, feelings and desires. Because God truly wants all persons to get on board, He has provided grace for all to do so. But we have the freedom to reject this grace and refuse to board in the exercise of our free will. If we decide to reject God's grace, it is not because God did not do everything He could short of overriding our freedom, to get and keep us in the train, but because we have chosen to reject Him.

Kearley (2008:4-5) studied predestination, foreordination, and election in light of Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11; Romans 8:28-30; the second epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians 2:13; Acts 2:23; and Acts 13:48, which may be read in his dissertation entitled, "The Biblical Doctrine of Predestination, Foreordination, and Election." In the chapter entitled "The Harmonious Teaching of the Bible Concerning Election," Kearley stated that in the fullest sense, the larger context of every passage of Scripture is the entire Bible. Since God is true, His word is truth. There can be no contradiction between truth, and that the interpretation of a single passage of the Scripture must be in harmony with the whole. Thus, the clear teaching of the Bible is that God "would have all humanity to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). God does not wish that "any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pt 3:9). Peter, who at one time thought only a particular race of people was chosen of God, had to be taught a thorough lesson on this very point through the vision he experienced, Peter said "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right" (Ac 10:34-35, NIV). Kearley says that it is clear that (a) the

Bible teaches that God loves every human being and has acted to make possible the salvation of each one; and (b) the death of Christ was for every sinner and makes it possible for everyone to receive atonement for their sins. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Christ, to demonstrate God’s love, experienced “death for everyone” (Heb 2:9). He “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tm 2:6). The great commission is aimed towards all human beings (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16). The invitation is extended to all. According to Revelation 22:17 NIV, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” Clearly, therefore, the atonement is not limited (as Calvin taught). Defending the Arminian perspective, Kearley contends that the plain teaching of the Scripture is that election is conditioned by human response or failure to respond to God in faith and obedience. It is not conditioned by God’s arbitrary choice, before the foundation of the world, as to whether one will be saved or lost. Kearley (2008:5) says that the Calvinistic concept is totally out of harmony with the plain provisions of the Scripture regarding the character of God. In his grammatical exegesis, he includes the word “*haireoma*” in the 2 Thessalonians 2:13, derived from the root meaning “to take for, or to, oneself; to select or choose.”⁸⁷ When Paul told the Thessalonians that “God chose [them] as first fruits unto salvation by sanctification of the spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Th 2:13), Kearley says that Paul simply was saying that in God’s providence, they were provided the opportunity to hear, believe, and obey the gospel. Kearley (2008:3-4) further explains that this passage relates “to choosing *where* and to *whom* the gospel should be preached first. It has nothing to do with a pre-selection of the saved and the lost before the foundation of the world.” He argues that “there is nothing inherent in some of the key words [of 2 Th 2:13] to suggest that individuals were selected before the foundation of the world to be saved, while others were selected before the foundation of the world to be lost.”

⁸⁷ Thayer and Smith entry for “*haireomai*,” see NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon.

Shank (1989:59) discussed three important theses in his writings. First, he affirmed that the salvation election potentially included all humanity. Second, he demonstrated that the salvation election unconditionally comprehends no particular race. Third, he stressed that the salvation election of grace efficiently comprehends the Israel of God. Shank (1970:91-158,162) says:

The matter of predestination, affirmed in Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:3-14, is not a decree of unconditional election and reprobation marking certain human race for salvation and all others for damnation, as Calvin and his disciples have assumed, but rather God's predetermination of the purposes and objectives and eternal circumstance of election: sonship, inheritance, and glorification with Christ.

This, according to Shank, implies the universality of the gospel's call as against Calvinism's thesis of a "general" call addressed to all humanity and a hidden "special" call arbitrarily granted to a particular group and withheld from others.

4.4 On the freedom of the human will: libertarianism versus compatibilism

Alexander and Johnson (2016:1) noted a resurgence of reflections on free will; they wrote that "the free will literature remains as deeply divided as ever between compatibilism and libertarianism." Walls and Dongell (2004:219-220) said that the source of all issues between Calvinism and Arminianism is the two different kinds of freedom set by Calvin and the Arminians (see also Ach & Weismann, 2013: par. 1). According to Kane (1998:5), "While issues about free will are multifaceted, the problem of free will has often been conceived more narrowly as a problem of free will versus determinism (or necessity) because the earliest and prevailing threats to free will came from doctrines asserting that all of our purposes and actions are determined or necessitated by factors beyond the control of our wills." He goes on to say that "what is often called the free will issue is really a cluster of questions revolving around the conception of human freedom." Hence, one has to first understand the different freedoms to understand the apparent difference of Calvin's thesis against that of the others.

The Arminians believe in "libertarian freedom"⁸⁸ or "libertarian free will" which means that "choices are free from the determination or constraints of human nature and free from any

⁸⁸ The reason for the redundancy of the term "libertarian freedom" is to distinguish it from the soft-deterministic notion of compatibilism, see Pinnock and Wagner *Grace for All* 160.

predetermination by God. [Arminians or free will theists] maintain that libertarian freedom is essential for moral responsibility, for if choices are determined or caused by anything, it cannot properly be called a free choice. Libertarian freedom is, therefore, the freedom to act contrary to one's nature, predisposition and greatest desires. Responsibility, in this view, always means that one could have done otherwise (see Theopedia, 2017). Pinnock and Wagner (2015:160) wrote, "The Arminians believe that freedom is by definition, the ability to have done something other than what one did in fact do." As human beings make the choice, they have the power to choose *A*, and the power to choose *not-A*, and it is up to them how they will choose.⁸⁹ Ultimately, the freedom patronized by the Arminians insists on an autonomous will to do or not to do, although influenced by external factors, it is however, not forced.

Calvinists disagree with libertarian freedom, rather, Calvinists forward "soft determinism" or "compatibilism"; that there is no logical inconsistency between freedom and determinism; that freedom and responsibility are compatible with total determinism (Walls & Dongell, 2004:107). Arminians argue that it is impossible that a person may completely be determined to do something (like a given choice) and at the same time, be free. Alexander and Johnson (2016:210) listed problems with Calvinism forwarding compatibilism. Among them is the problem with sin, they (2016:210) argue that compatibilism implies that God is also the author of sin, "If God is the author of the entire creation and its storyline, it follows that God is the author of the sinful actions that take place within that creation." Hunt and White (2004:327) consider this definition of compatibilism as "double-talk."

To Calvinists, freedom and determinism are not mutually exclusive; rather they are in sync with each other (McKenna & Coates, 2004). According to Walls and Dongell (2004:108) an action is free if it meets the following conditions:

- (1) a free act is not caused or compelled by anything external to the agent who performs it;
- (2) it is, however, caused by something internal to the agent, namely, a psychological state of affairs such as a belief, desire or some combination of these two; and,
- (3) the agent performing the act could have done differently if he or she had wanted to.

⁸⁹ For excellent discussion of the liberty tradition (including classical liberalism), see Mack and Gaus "Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism" 115; Barnett *Moral Foundations of Modern Libertarianism* 1-19; Brennan *Libertarianism* 1-5.

Compatibilists often define an instance of free will as one in which the agent had freedom to act according to their own motivation – that is, the agent was not coerced or restrained. Schopenhauer (1945:531) famously said, “Man can do what he wants, but he cannot will what he will.” Although an agent may often be free to act according to a particular motive, the nature of that motive is determined (Podgorski, 2015). In this sense, free will is also autonomous,⁹⁰ the ability to live according to one’s own rules, as opposed to being submitted to external domination. This view is supported by the description of the special call in the Westminster Confession of Faith (see quotation above, section 5.1). Walls and Dongell (2004:218, 220) said that compatibilism is incoherent unless one understands how freedom is defined by the compatibilists. Pinnock and Wagner (2016:160) wrote, “Libertarians insist that the only way compatibilists can make divine determinism and human freedom compatible is to redefine free will to mean, not the ability to have chosen otherwise, but rather that ability to do what one wants to do.” Feinberg (1986:19-43) ultimately argues that “Calvinists as determinists must either reject freedom altogether or accept compatibilism,” because a compatibilist’s definition of freedom results to a stark implication on salvation. Helm (2010:115-124), a Calvinist philosopher, once suggested that if we suppose some form of compatibilism, then God could have created men and women who freely (in a sense compatible with determinism) did only what was morally right. God could have determined things and made people free (as Calvinists define freedom) in such a way that they would have freely done the right thing all the time and God could have determined all people to freely, gladly, and joyously worship Him and praise Him forever and ever. This huge implication is summarized as the Calvinist conundrum, thus:

(1) God truly loves all persons; (2) to truly love someone is to desire their well-being and to promote their true flourishing as much as you can; (3) the well-being and true flourishing of all persons is to be found in a right relationship with God, a saving relationship in which we love and obey Him; (4) God could determine all persons freely to accept a right relationship with Him and be saved; and, (5) therefore, all will be saved.

⁹⁰ Autonomy in Greek is αὐτονομία from αὐτόνομος from αὐτο – auto – “self” and νόμος – *nomos* – “law,” when combined is understood to mean “one who gives oneself one’s own law”, a concept found in moral, political, and bioethical philosophy; within these contexts, it is the capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, un-coerced decision; Autonomy can also be defined as the psychology of atheism, when we look back to the biblical account of the fall of humanity, theologians characteristically describe the principal motive for human being’s first sin as the pursuit or the quest for autonomy, see Sproul 2017 <http://www.ligonier.org>

(Walls, 2013)

The syllogism of the Calvinist conundrum goes without saying that if all the arguments are valid, but the conclusion is rejected, it is but logical to reject one or more of the premises to keep the argument valid. Arminians can easily reject premise number 4 because they don't believe that freedom and determinism are compatible, but the Calvinists cannot reject this premise without contradicting themselves because it is the basis of the Reformed perspective on God's grace. Premise number 3 cannot be rejected by both parties because it is the basis of Christian anthropology. So, the Calvinist has two more options left whether to reject premise 2 or 1; or either deny that God loves everybody. Ultimately, the Reformed theology of unconditional election (U), limited atonement (L) and irresistible grace (I) [in the Five Points of Calvinism] in relation to the human freedom, remain to be mysteries. It is still a rich source of theological debate (Milton, 1674).

4.5 Calvinism versus Hyper-Calvinism

Packer (1973:7-8) remarked that theologians in the 17th century followed a direction away from traditional Calvinism (the rise of Puritans and Anglicans started a following of Calvinist dissenters), "The 18th century saw a reaction which saw itself as a rediscovery of the true line of Reformed development. But in an increasingly rationalistic age, the reaction itself was rationalistic, within the Reformed super-naturalistic frame, as the movements away from that frame had been, [thus] it earned itself the name 'Hyper-Calvinism.'" Wright (1996:78) observed that some of his fellow Calvinists are not clear on the idea of free will and sounded partly like Arminians. As the result of the Calvinist conundrum, Calvinism was further split into two groups as according to the understanding of God's grace in all its worth and how they defended their faith against their opponents. These two factions were called the "Consistent Calvinists" who were deemed to be loyal to the teachings of Calvin; and the "Inconsistent Calvinists" who manifested deviations from the original teachings of Calvin (cf. Walls & Dongell, 2004:164). The latter is also associated with Hyper-Calvinism.

Talbot and Crampton (1999:v) defined Hyper-Calvinism as a “perversion of Calvinism. It so stressed the sovereignty of God that human responsibility is practically eliminated. The need for evangelism is also undermined by Hyper-Calvinism as well as a proper understanding of the doctrines of the Scripture.” Engelsma (1994:4-5) wrote that Hyper-Calvinism is a masked “deceptive” attack on Calvinism itself.

The previous chapter has enumerated the Calvinistic teachings on grace through the acrostic TULIP. Of these, Talbot and Crampton (1999:13) wrote that the major tenet infused in the Reformed or Calvinistic theology is the sovereignty of God. In the previous section, we saw that the sovereignty of God has been confronted with human free will which was integrated in the operationalization of salvation. Calvinist-dissenters argue that ultimately, it is human freedom that plays a major role in salvation as it forwards the principle of moral responsibility. Calvinists on the other hand, believe that human freedom is honoured in acknowledging God’s sovereignty over human will and salvation. Hence, a consistent Calvinist understands compatibilism and embraces its implications (Walls & Dongell, 2004:161). Pink (2002:30) confessed, “When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody.” This earned him the title of a consistent Calvinist (Walls, 2016:3). Walls himself was shocked by his statements but praised Pink’s boldness and unwavering statement. By Pink’s statements, he understood the fundamental point of the Calvinistic theology of grace and didn’t waiver when it came to the implications. He strongly believed that God is completely sovereign, and that God chooses to save some and reprobate some, reflecting the fundamental teachings of Calvinism. Wright also professed:

If God had elected to save everyone without exception, and all would certainly be saved. But God never had the slightest intention of saving everyone. That is what the doctrine of election means in the first place: God chooses some, but not all ... That God may have reasons of His own for choosing me for salvation and not my father (who, as far as I know, died an atheist) may well be so, but it is certain that I did not supply Him with those reasons.

(Wright, 1996:131-132, 102)

Piper (1983:9-13) too exclaimed, “But I am not ignorant that God may not have chosen my sons for His sons. And, though I think I would give my life for their salvation, if they should be lost to

me, I would not rail against the Almighty. He is God. I am but a man. The Potter has absolute rights over the clay. Mine is to bow before His unimpeachable character and believe the Judge of all the earth has ever and always will do right.” These statements reflect an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God and its role in the salvation narrative and in the lives of those He governs, that, regardless of its unpopular message, surrender to God’s reasoning is resorted to. The Westminster Confession of Faith (3.1) relays this message of God’s sovereignty, “God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.” Consistent Calvinism is therefore the adherence and reliance to the sovereignty of God irrespective of its radical message.

Packer (1973:23) wrote, “Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled though he is also a responsible moral agent. The reality of human moral agency and responsibility in a world where God is Lord is one of the mysteries of creation, which we reverently acknowledge, but do not pretend fully to understand.” Freedom and determinism are perfectly compatible if we define freedom in the compatibilist sense. One must somehow try to hold together both determinism (sovereignty defined as determinism) and libertarian freedom. Packer implies that the unity of determinism and freedom is an ironic but possible mystery. Packer (1973:21) says, “Accept it for what it is and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding.” According to Walls and Dongell (2004:116), what Packer is trying to indicate is an implicit contradiction and typically, the kind of contradiction we can find in Calvinism. An implicit contradiction can be made explicit by adding definitions and employing basic logic. Helm (1994:61-66) thus asked, “In these circumstances, what is the difference between an apparent inconsistency and a real one? How do we know that what is called an antinomy⁹¹ might not turn out to be a real inconsistency?”

It is important to distinguish the real contradiction found in apparent contradiction to see why “hyper-grace” is inconsistent with Calvinism. Apparent contradiction can be understood in two

⁹¹ See Helm *Providence of God* 61-66.

concepts which are quite paradoxical and mysterious (Basinger, 1987:205-213). A paradox is a surface contradiction that is merely verbal, but not real.⁹² In his earlier statement, what Packer (1973:23) was trying to indicate was an implicit contradiction. Packer (2015: par. 5) spells out the implicit premises and implications on what he sees as the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism. He wrote, “So the basic difference between the two positions is not that Arminianism discerns a *bona fide* free offer of Christ in the gospel that Calvinism fails to discern and takes seriously; nor that Arminianism acknowledges human moral responsibility before God while Calvinism reduces our race to robots.” Arminians often claim that they believe that God loves everybody; that God sends out the gospel to all persons. Walls commented that Packer presents a neutral position, and although professing to be a Calvinist, Walls identifies Packer to be an Inconsistent Calvinist for his unwillingness to take on a more definite stance (cf. Walls, 2013). Packer (2015: par. 5) thinks that the universal call of the gospel is also true, and that God makes a *bona fide* offer to all people, consistent with Arminianism. The difference is certainly not that they take responsibility seriously and that Calvinists think people are robots, but that Calvinism also touches on moral responsibility too. Packer (1973:422) continues, “Everyone in the Reformed mainstream will insist that Christ the Saviour is freely offered. Indeed, Christ freely offers Himself – to sinners in and through the gospel; and that since God gives all free agency (that is, voluntary decision-making power), we are answerable to Him for what we do. But Calvinism, at the same time, affirms the total perversity, depravity, and inability of fallen man, which results in him naturally and continually using his free agency to say no to God.” Packer insists that Calvinists truly believe that God makes a *bona fide* offer of the gospel to all people and then offers Himself to everyone in good faith. Packer’s position leads to the following claims on Calvinism:

- (1) Only the elect can actually accept the offer of salvation;
- (2) Not all are elect;
- (3) Not all persons can actually accept the offer of salvation and be saved;
- (4) God makes a *bona fide* offer of salvation to all persons;
- (5) A *bona fide* offer is one that can actually be accepted by the person to whom it offered; and,
- (6) All persons can actually accept the offer of salvation and be saved.

⁹² Oxford Dictionary *Paradox*; Smith and Lewis 2011 *AMR* 381-403; Zhang Waldman Han and Li 2015 *AMJ* 538-566; Bolander 2008 <https://plato.stanford.edu>

(Walls, 2013)

There is obviously an explicit contradiction between these two statements: (3) not all persons can actually accept the offer of salvation and be saved and (6) all persons can actually accept the offer of salvation and be saved. It is an outright logical contradiction. We cannot make both of these true by filling in a mystery. It doesn't make one pious to think he or she can. Walls continued by saying that following Packer's contention will only lead to more confusion for those who seriously wants to study Calvinism.

4.6 Righteousness by faith: The Hyper-grace movement

"It is finished; two thousand years ago, and our sins have been forgiven past, present, and future" (Ellis, 2013:2; Prince, 2014).⁹³ The Hyper-grace⁹⁴ movement convincingly inject such convenient teaching to the salvation narrative, reflecting on how they view grace as righteousness through Christ by faith. This seemingly "new" message is distinctly refreshing as compared to previous narratives on salvation where the trend relies on a moral merit as the basis for heavenly rewards. Orthodox teachings usually teach a do-good theme – "do good and God will bless you or do good and God will save you". However, the stream of Christian thought is now turning to a different orientation. The recent paradigm shift from a "law-focused" to "grace-focused" gospel is more popularly referred to as the "Grace-revolution". From a law-focused ministry where members of the church are castigated to be chastened, Grace-revolutionists stress on a teaching of grace so that the members who sin do not feel condemned by God, rather, they are called into the righteousness of and through Christ so that there may be a hunger of grace which may only be satisfied in the church-experience (Yancey, 1997:14-16). Thus, *Grace-revolution* is a claim to revolutionize the Reformed tradition to awaken it from

⁹³ See also Brown 2017 <https://www.youtube.com>

⁹⁴ The term hyper-grace has been used to describe a new wave of teaching that emphasizes God's grace to the exclusion of other vital teachings such as repentance and confession of sin; Hyper-grace teachers maintain that all sins past, present, and future, has already been forgiven, so there is no need for a believer to ever confess it, they also teach that when God looks at us, He sees only a holy and righteous people; Thus, we are not bound by Jesus' teaching, even as we are not under the law; that believers are not responsible for their sin and that anyone who disagrees is a pharisaic legalist; in short, hyper-grace teachers "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (Jude 1:4) and flirt with antinomianism, see Brown 2014 <https://www.gotquestions.org>

its long silence and make complete what is incomplete. It seeks to cure the failure to reform the Protestant church to emphasize the doctrine of grace (Brown, 2014:8-11).

Whitten (2012:25-26) claims that little has changed in the Protestant church in more than 500 years until now. He believes that Luther and Calvin got it right concerning justification, or how one is saved. However, Whitten adds, that they missed it on sanctification, or how one is perfected into Christ-likeness. Whitten further accused Luther and Calvin of teaching a doctrine of “saved by grace but perfected by human effort,” an approach that has produced “a church that is judgmental, angry, hopeless, dependent, fearful, uninspired, ineffective, and perpetually spiritually immature” (see also Brown, 2014:8-11). Because of this, Whitten claims that the church has failed to impact modern culture rather; the church has become a laughingstock to most casual observers. He further contends that this sanctification doctrine by Luther and Calvin has brought personal devastation to countless believers who have consequently checked out from the church or departed from a relationship with God. Whitten then suggests a theological reformation to heal the church, a Grace-revolution, from a law-focused to a grace-focused teaching where the church shall refrain from harping on human sinfulness and shall start focusing on the total sanctification of sinners, in which “all sin, past, present, and future, has already been forgiven.” Crowder (2010:17, 94) added, “Just as there is a new mysticism on the rise, [he] believes it is coupled with a new reformation. The good news will be preached with such clarity that, even the days of Luther will seem utterly primitive in its concepts of grace and faith. Even the Reformers were not reformed enough.” Likewise, Van der Merwe (2011:68) said, “The church today does not need another spiritual revival (because revivals come and go); it needs another theological reformation as it did in the days of Luther! Reformation will automatically bring about revival.”

However, Reformists caution against this “new reformation”. The Reformed tradition holds on to the Pauline corpus of grace as righteousness through Christ by faith. However, for Calvinists, justification and sanctification are inseparable, and regeneration precedes faith, not the other way around (see Packer, 1993:170; Sproul, 1990:91-112). What the Reformers see in this “new

revelation” wave is an end time heresy and a New Testament prophecy which we can find in the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Calvinists opine that this “new movement” is ushering in a danger where the doctrine of grace may be misinterpreted by believers who are yet young in their spirit, as a license to sin (Brown, 2016: chap. 2; Ravenhill, 2013). Brown and Ravenhill imply that such stance is the deadliest position because it goes beyond biblical grace, misleading many believers to confusion and weakness in their confession of sin and repentance. In such case, the worth of grace is evidently cheapened (cf. Bonhoeffer, 1959:43-45).

According to Hyper-grace teachings, “because Jesus has died for us and made us righteous, we are now fully accepted in Christ and not only were we already justified, so that God puts us into the righteous count but that we were also sanctified, but that God also only sees Jesus in us, making us perfectly holy in God’s sight. God doesn’t see our sins anymore because Jesus died for all our sins – past, present, and future. That means all of our sins had already been considered forgiven by God – past, present, and future.⁹⁵ Therefore, confession of sin and repentance is no longer needed and so as spirituality is effortless” (Wommack, 2011:39; Prince, 2010:xii, 145, 341; Dunn, 2011:141; Crowder, 2010:9, 39). Hyper-grace also teaches that Christians achieve perfection through Christ. Prince (2010:145, 341) says, “The moment we accepted Jesus, God gave us an eternal ‘A+’ for our right standing with Him.” Whitten (2012:66) also says, “We are like Him [Jesus], my friend, and are in a permanent and unchangeable state of being of holiness.” The second chapter of Crowder’s book “Mystical Union” said that sanctification is not a process. Crowder (2010:42) writes, “The moment we decide to do something to be holy, we have trusted in ourselves, instead of Christ, for salvation.” He means a total suspension and dependence to Christ for holiness. Likewise, Ellis (2012:112) wrote, “There is nothing wrong with wanting to better ourselves, but we have to understand that in Christ, we are already as good and pleasing to God as we ever will be.” He adds, “But don’t confuse behaviour with identity; we are not defined by what we do, our identity is Christ and in Him, we

⁹⁵ See Brown 2017 <https://www.youtube.com>

are and always will be 100% pleasing and acceptable to God” (Ellis, 2015). Ellis’ message convinces Christians that they are perfect, 100% pleasing and acceptable to God, no matter what they do, nothing could be further from that truth. Rufus (2011) supported Crowder’s position by saying, “Sanctification isn’t a process! We do not become more and more holy. No! We become holy once and for all! We become sanctified once and for all. Now the life we live is the overflow of what has happened, that miracle overflowing through our mind and through our body!” Prince (2007:187) also preached that sanctification is not a process. He wrote, “Stop examining yourself and searching your heart for sin. Remember that when someone takes his sin offering to the priest, the priest does not examine him. He examines the sin offering.” He referred to “offering” as the person of Jesus Christ and preached a Jesus-focused preaching rather than a sin-conscious one. Apparently, Christian living is not a process but merely putting all our confidence to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

It is safe to say that one of the most prominent preachers of the Grace-revolution is Joseph Prince.⁹⁶ He was known to have made grace the spotlight of Christian interest today. Prince has had a numerous number of following as a result of his charismatic preaching and a number of best-seller books on the topic. There are thousands, if not millions, of people in his congregation, apart from his social media followers and listeners who are obviously captivated by his sermons. Andrew Wommack is also well-known in this movement. These two Grace-revolution icons were taught together in the Word of Faith Camp, a school of New Grace Reformation (cf. LURM, 2011). Those who attended the camp included Steve McVay, Clark Whitten, Brennan Manning, John Crowder, Rob Rufus, Paul Ellis, among others. They all generally emphasize a number of the same key points and the same reaction to the Reformed counter points. Even though it’s not monolithic, there are a lot of similarities from one teacher to the next and their teachings repeat those that were originally taught by the others (cf. Brown, 2017).

⁹⁶ Prince named himself so; at birth, he was Xenonamandar Jegahusiee Singh, the Singapore-born son of an Indian father and a Chinese mother, see Chu 2013 <http://www.ozy.com>

Manning (2008:21) wrote that the grace of God is for all:

At the last judgment Christ will say to us, "come, you also! Come, drunkards! Come, weaklings! Come, children of shame!" And he will say to us: "vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same, you as well." And the wise and prudent will say, "Lord, why do you welcome them?" And He will say: "If I welcome them, you wise men, if I welcome them, you prudent men, it is because not one of them has ever been judged worthy." And He will stretch out His arms, and we will fall at His feet, and we will cry out sobbing, and then we will understand all. We will understand the gospel of grace! Lord, your kingdom come!

It means that the gospel of grace accepts us all regardless of what we have done or who we are. The only requisite is for us to come and confess that Jesus is our righteousness, irrespective of any knowledge of Him. God is pleased with us because of Jesus, no matter who we were, who we are and what we did, do, or will do.

Crowder (2015) said that grace must be viewed "hyperly or in a hyper sense", if not, one is limiting the depths of the revelation of grace and underestimating Jesus Christ. "It is because the 'scandal of grace' is indeed so scandalous." In response to Brown's (2016: chap. 2) and Ravenhill's (2013) criticisms, Crowder defends that the grace-revolutionists are not at all teaching grace as a license to sin, rather, that grace results to a freedom from sin. He further argued that the doctrine of sanctification and the Christian walk, are no longer applicable (obsolete) to those already in Christ, because Jesus already finished it all, as a gift to those who believe and follow Him.

According to Ellis (2012:2) "grace isn't a bunch of rules for us to keep. And grace is not God's lubricant for greasing the cogs of self-effort. Grace is a person living His life through us. Living under grace is like being married, only more so, it's the adventure of life shared with Christ." Prince (2007:24) also said, "Grace is not a theology. It is not a subject matter. It is not a doctrine. It is a person, and His name is Jesus. That's the reason the Lord wants us to receive the abundance of grace, for us to have the abundance of grace is to have the abundance of Jesus." Common to their preaching is the emphasis that grace is not a mere teaching, but a person – the person of Jesus Christ.

Because of the radical message of the Grace-revolutionists, multiple questions tend to arise. Of them are the following: Is the gospel of grace contrary to the enabling power to live a holy life

which Paul taught us?; Does the mere confession that Jesus Christ is our righteousness make us righteous and eventually disciples of Christ?; Why did Paul encourage the followers or believers of Christ to walk in unity, holiness, love, light, wisdom and to stand in warfare⁹⁷?; Is the gospel of grace the secret for an effortless success?; Because of His love, kindness, and mercy, is God spoiling us because Christ is now our shield against God's wrath? Answers to these typical questions ultimately delineate Calvinism from Hyper-Calvinism. But as typical as they may seem to be, confusion arise as to where the different faiths exactly stand on these points.

Conflict and confusion is not of God. Grace as it was discussed in this chapter is divisive as it seemingly goes beyond biblical explanation. In his commentary on Prince's works, Mattera (2013) concluded, "Prince makes the same mistake thousands before him have made: they come up with some kind of theological system they are comfortable with and then deductively read every passage of the Scripture with their biased lens, resulting in forcing the Scripture to fit their interpretation. Many people make the mistake of wanting to fit God into a concise theological box, resulting in blanket statements that are not always easily proven or true." Other critics follow the same tune as Mattera's. Brown (2014:xi-xii) acknowledges that in one way or another these movements, have indeed changed the lives of many and have introduced God's grace to those who stigmatized the Christian religion as a religion where fear and judgment is preached, however, he also warns against its dangers, "because this new version of the message of grace has been distorted, it is also hurting many others, not to mention dividing churches and leading some into outright heresy."

4.7 Conclusion

We have seen, in this chapter, the threats to consistent Calvinism. Although those mentioned here are but some among many contentions against the teachings of Calvinism, those listed here are fundamental, substantial and damaging to the Calvinistic or the Reformed perspective of grace.

⁹⁷ See Hoehner *Ephesians* 497-817.

We have seen the opposition against the doctrine of human total depravity (T) from many sources. Anti-Calvinists assert that we are not at all too spiritually depraved that we cannot choose salvation or God, while others agree that indeed we are totally depraved and thus need God's grace for us to come to God. Anti-Calvinists also insist that God shows grace by merely enlightening and persuading the human-will to choose Him, but He does not however change the human-will to preserve the human free-will. Anti-Calvinists believe that we somehow retain libertarian freedom to choose whether or not we will accept the message of God. Calvinists however, maintain a compatibilist perspective where the sovereignty of God takes primacy and thus, by His sovereignty and His will, He ultimately renews the human spirit and replaces it with a Spirit of His own, from the old sinner to the new saint, from a sin-filled and depraved state into a new and godly mind-set that ultimately will choose God.

We also saw the growing popularity of distortions of Calvinism. While these movements support Calvinism to some extent, they however, overextend or cut-out portions of the Reformed teaching as they deem fit and present an innovated and radical version of the original doctrines. The Hyper-Calvinism and the Hyper-Grace movement, albeit young concepts are however, growing dynamically and widespread.

The truth as to how one is saved is key to the understanding of the gospel message. Knowledge of which brings us closer to the knowledge of God and of our being. Indeed, we are saved by grace through faith alone. One reason why some Christians have no idea how they are saved is because their idea of grace is confused with the unrelenting debates and the emergence of conflicting teachings on the subject matter. While Christians are debating and destroying each other's theology, young believers are further confused and taken aback in their Christian walk. While these are collateral damages into the quest for pruning the truth through discourse, nevertheless, debate is crucial as it opens a wide avenue to relaying the truth and weeding out through all the clutters which are devised to suit institutional or even personal beliefs or other religious inclinations which however are not biblically rooted. Grace is one of the most fundamental topics in theology even though it divides the body of Christ. The knowledge of

God's grace and its role in human salvation, releases believers from a burden imposed on them by unbiblical teachings and releases them from the chains of false dogma. "*Sola gratia*," it is by God's grace alone that we may be saved from eternal damnation. Although there is uniformity in the recognition that God's grace is essential, questions still lurk as to how much from the sinner and how much from God is needed for salvation.

CHAPTER 5

IN DEFENCE OF CALVIN

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 of this study emphasized on the sovereignty of God as a cardinal principle in the Calvinistic doctrine of Grace and is the very foundation of the Reformed theology found in the Five Points of Calvinism, and in the Five *So/as* (pillars). The clash between the Calvinists and the Arminians⁹⁸ ultimately centres on the role of God's sovereignty in the salvation narrative. We have also studied the opposition of the Pelagian-Anthropological theology⁹⁹ which contends that sinners aren't totally deprived to choose a godly life. On the Calvinist principle of Unconditional Election and Limited Atonement, we have seen the debate between the proponents of the divine predestination versus those of human free-will¹⁰⁰. On Irresistible Grace, we have studied the different classifications of freedoms in which oppositions to the Calvinist compatibilist position argued that human free-will is not at all compatible with God's determinism and that they are mutually exclusive¹⁰¹. On the theology of righteousness by faith¹⁰², we have seen the debate on the perseverance of the saints; on whether Christians can or cannot really fall away from faith. While the previous chapter talked about the challenges against the Calvinist theology on grace, this chapter will present the response of Calvinists to these questions through the Reformed tradition.

Because of the continuous tensions within and among the Christian churches, there has been a growing awareness in the church of the necessity for reformation and revival. However, neo-liberals such as Robinson (1965:10f.), believes that we are already on the verge of a new reformation. Neo-orthodox scholar, Torrance (1965:282) of Edinburgh, who strongly objects to the theology of Bultmann, Tillich and Robinson, among other, nevertheless believes that

⁹⁸ Section 4:1:2.

⁹⁹ S 4:1:1.

¹⁰⁰ S 4:2.

¹⁰¹ S 4:3.

¹⁰² S 4:5.

“without doubt we are in the midst of a vast new reformation – it shows a steady and ineluctable advancement in spite of wider and more extravagant theologies and movements which appear on the flanks of the Church’s forward march.” As we observe contemporary circumstances, we can deduce that indeed, both presumptions of Torrance and Robinson appear to be true. As discussed in chapter 4, the desperation for a new subjective revelation for a new Reformation theology is rapidly spreading and becoming a popular message in Christian churches, especially among Evangelicals.

Calvin and his proponents however, offer a counter-thesis against such heterodoxies. The Calvinistic theology and the Reformed doctrine of grace best serve in resisting the growing apostasies within the church, henceforth the development of the Calvinists of a methodological defence, such as the TULIP and the *five solas*, to counter controversial ecclesiastical debates. To persuade through apologetics requires theologians to develop a systematic approach towards the exposition of the doctrines of grace. It is important to take note that not all Reformed affiliations are Calvinistic in their theology and that these groups raise questions on some points of the TULIP; however, all Calvinists are follow the Reformed tradition in general. In other words, some Reformed groups¹⁰³ do not entirely agree with the TULIP but all Calvinists entirely believe both the TULIP and the Five *Solas* – the pillars of the Reformed Church.

5.2 Calvin’s systematic theology: The Institutes

Calvin consolidated his teachings and thoughts in his writings and sermons as he was also known to be a prolific writer. One of his most scholarly works is, “*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*”¹⁰⁴ (referred herein as Institutes) which is considered his magnum opus and regarded as a classic seminal reference in systematic theology. As such, what follows and most citations in this chapter are from Calvin’s Institutes and from Selderhuis’ (ed. *et al.*, 2009) “The Calvin handbook”.

¹⁰³ Case in point, the Hyper-Calvinism namely the early English Particular Baptists in the 18th century, do not believe in what the Reformists call the benevolent love of God for His creation or the common grace which falls under the discussion of Unconditional Election (U) and Irresistible Grace (I) in the five points of Calvinism, compare Horton 2005 <http://www.ligonier.org>

¹⁰⁴ For more information, see <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/>

Calvin's Institutes is unprecedented in its influence in the Protestant church. His work outlines a systematic explanation of the whole of the Christian faith as he understood it. It was where he attempted to unpack and disclose everything that God has revealed to human beings about Himself and about us in the Scriptures.

The Institutes is neatly divided into four books; book one discusses God as our creator manifested through His creation narration in Scripture; book two is about Christ as our redeemer, human sin and human salvation; book three covers the human acceptance of that salvation through justification by faith and predestination; and, book four discusses the outward vehicle of that salvation – the church and the two sacraments.

5.2.1 Calvin's methodologies: exegesis and doctrina

Selderhuis (ed. *et al.*, 2009:378-379) said that the concept of *doctrina* and its usage – among other important theological concepts, such as religion, justification, sanctification, and manifestation – is at the heart of the Reformation theology. The writings of Calvin are especially characterized by his use of this term – *doctrina*. This assertion is not an attempt to repeat the fruitless efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to find “a” or “the” central theme, core, or motif in the theology of Calvin. It is not contested that the concept of *doctrina* was widely used in the sixteenth century – in discussions as well as in works of theological nature. The use of the concept of *doctrina* reveals much about an author's view of the Scripture, about the central role and significance of the exegesis of the Scripture in the writings of an author, and about his Christology and ecclesiology.

D'Assonville (2009:378-384) observed that Calvin's usage of the concept of *doctrina* in his writings is noteworthy. Already in 1536, in the introductory sentence of the first edition of his Institutes, he spoke about the *summa* of the *sacra doctrina* (which was changed in the succeeding editions to the *sacra sapientia*). Observably, Calvin strikingly used this concept often throughout his writings. Valuable features regarding his exegesis can be derived from this usage. Hence, two aspects are to be considered in this regard. On one hand, it reveals how

Calvin understood and explained the Scripture relative to his usage of the concept of *doctrina*. On the other hand, the way we read and interpret Calvin should take into account this application of the concept of *doctrina* (see also Britz, 2002:673-675).

Selderhuis (ed. *et al.*, 2009:378-379) methodically provided a guideline for handling the doctrinal concept as Calvin would: He wrote:

An analysis of the handling of the *doctrina* concept by Calvin requires a number of guidelines, which are of critical significance for any research on Calvin and his works. Although these parameters for reading texts are self-evident, it is disappointing to note how often they are neglected in studies on Calvin. The period in which a specific writing has originated, together with its historical setting and context, should always be taken into consideration. The genre of the writing (e.g., commentaries, tractates, sermons, polemical writings, Institutes, etc.) is also of decisive importance when analysing Calvin's work. It is also important to note that respective writings of Calvin should, as far as possible, be treated as a whole in order to refrain from using singular citations from different works in a way that does violence to the original context.

As part of his exegetical activities, Calvin translated most of the books of the Old and New Testaments from the original Hebrew and Greek texts, respectively, into either Latin or French. When he worked on the New Testament, he had a number of printed Greek texts at his disposal. In the process of translating the Greek texts, he always favoured a source-text orientated, grammatical-historical concordant translation. He often engaged in a discourse with the Vulgate as well as with Erasmus' Latin edition. Consequently, the Latin concept of *doctrina* was not only a useful tool for Calvin in expressing himself theologically but was also presented to him as a biblical concept, whether in Vulgate's or in Erasmus' translation (or even in other Latin translations, like d'Etaples, that is, Stapulensis) or, of course, in his own translation (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:379).

5.2.2 The unity of theology

Calvin's theological usage of the concept of *doctrina* is remarkable. He does not use the concept of *doctrina* in a static, negative doctrinal, dogmatic way but he endeavoured to allow exegesis and dogmatics to co-exist. Biblical and systematic theology and pastoral theology are in harmony, or, to state it in stronger terms, all these different fields of theology are, for Calvin, parts of one unified body of theology, which, as a whole, cannot be divided or separated. This

insight has essential consequences for the teaching and tutoring of pastors, for exegesis and theology in general, but also for research on Calvin in particular (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:384).

5.3 Reformed Calvinistic apologetics: Defensive doctrinal formulas

This tradition is summarized in the doctrine of double predestination. The doctrine of double predestination is the stamp of Calvin and of Reformed theology.¹⁰⁵ Double predestination is the belief that just as God predestined His elect to eternal life in Christ, He likewise predestined (reprobated) the rest to hell. Predestination is also called God's eternal decree, in which He compacted with Himself what He willed to become of each human being. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others (Calvin, 1960:926; Inst. 3.21.5).

The concept of double predestination was one of Calvin's more controversial teachings. Thus, he wrote extensively to defend this belief. Its exclusionary nature and uncouth consequence was unpopular with most who strongly believe in the generality of God's love and His all-embracing grace unto all. In the final edition of his Institutes, Calvin devoted some eighty pages to defending this doctrine.¹⁰⁶ However, despite its controversial nature, double predestination became the official position of the Reformed church.

This section will provide an Orthodox critique and defence of Reformed theology. It focuses on the Reformed doctrinal formulation – the "TULIP" – as it provides a clear and concise summary of the tenets in Reformed theology. The author argues on God's sovereignty (as the foundation of all theologies) and for the Five *Solas* or pillars as basis for the arguments of the Reformed

¹⁰⁵ Calvin and Calvinism are not synonymous although they're closely related; the relationship between Calvin and Reformed theology is more complex than most people realize; as a matter of fact, we should be warned against equating the two; also, it should be noted that some would dispute the centrality of predestination for Calvin's theology; thus, double predestination is defined as being an "ancillary doctrine, concerned with explaining a puzzling aspect of the consequence of the proclamation of the gospel of grace," see McGrath *Life of John Calvin* 7, 169.

¹⁰⁶ Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion" 21-25; for a discussion of the growing prominence of the doctrine in the successive editions of Calvin's Institutes, see Pelikan's *Reformation of Church and Dogma 1300–1700* 217-220.

theology on its doctrine on grace. The critique will consist of two parts; part 1 will expound on God's sovereignty and the TULIP; and part 2 will discuss the Five *Solas*.

5.3.1 God's sovereignty and the TULIP

The citations and comparisons are in accordance to but not limited to the Institutes of Calvin and Calvin's other works and from the Canons of Dort (the official confession of the Dutch Reformists); other major confessions, e.g., the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Belgic Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism; also, the works by classic and contemporary Reformed theologians, and from the author's thoughts.

5.3.1.1 God's sovereignty: Calvinistic vs Arminian Perspective

Calvin¹⁰⁷ examined the nature of God as revealed in creation. He explained why our sinful eyes were so dulled to that revelation that we needed to turn to the Scripture to have a knowledge of God. Observably, Calvin extends God's role as creator to include His absolute control over everything that happens in the universe, from the smallest to the greatest.

The idea of the sovereignty of God was Calvin's most central doctrine. It implied that nothing is left to chance or human free-will. This is what led him to put such emphasis on the doctrine of predestination – the idea that God, not us, decides whether we will be saved or not. This point of view was hugely influential and popular among Protestants in the sixteenth century but became far more controversial later.

In Calvin's Institutes, book one chapter sixteen, its part one sets the basic idea of God's sovereignty; part two denies the idea of chance and that anything in the world is random; and, part three counters some alternative interpretations of God's sovereignty; part six explores God's control of human actions. Calvin (1509–1564) declared God's absolute control of everything as his central theological foundation (Tomkins, 2017).

¹⁰⁷ Inst 1:16.

Calvin was confronted when Ritschl (1889:2) countered “that in the grounding of salvation through Christ, the gracious will of God coincides in one connection with the angry will” (*Rechtfertigung*). Does this mean that Calvin propounded a doctrine in which the anger and grace of God coincide in such a way that God’s anger is allayed by a victim so that God might look upon us with favour? According to Calvin¹⁰⁸ this has to do with a problem that God must solve: how can God be a reconciler without His righteous excluding of reconciliation with the wickedness of the evildoer? Calvin’s answer to that is found in the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians 5:21: “We were made the righteousness of God as a result of Christ’s having been made sin” (CO, 1863-1900:50:74), “as a criminal” (Inst. 2.16.5). This is the thought behind the blessed exchange: “*Filius Dei? In infernus est: sed homo refertur ad caelum*” [The son of God is in hell, but the human is borne up to heaven] (Inst. 2.16.11). For Calvin¹⁰⁹ God’s love is only love if it is not thought of as being excluded from God’s righteousness. God’s love would otherwise be questionable under the suspicion that it was doing something unjust. God’s anger is the righteous “no” to unrighteousness. But thanks to the affirmation of this “no,” in Christ’s giving of Himself for us, we are reconciled with God by the death of Christ (Rm 5:10). Calvin¹¹⁰ calls this “*naturae rerum*” conversion, “transmutation of nature.” Christ takes the place of the sinner and because He, in our place, does nothing evil but in obedience to God, He passively suffers our condemnation (Inst. 2.12.3). Therefore, our justification and our redemption take place (Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:230-231; Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:230-231). God is both loving and just as the Creator of all. He is sovereign to all His creations. This is the Calvinistic answer to the question of who God is.¹¹¹

5.3.1.2 Total depravity for Pelagian-anthropological controversy (T)

Calvin’s teaching on this topic (Christian anthropology) is found in the 1539 Institutes. A fuller exposition is found in his 1543 response to Pighius [Pelagius], “*Defensio sanae et orthodoxae*

¹⁰⁸ See Comm on 2 Cor 5:21.

¹⁰⁹ CO 49:94.

¹¹⁰ Inst 2:16:6.

¹¹¹ One must consult Williams *Monologion and Proslogion* 1f, 91f; also, the Satisfaction Theory of Atonement and the Ontological Argument for God’s existence by Anselm of Canterbury, see Anselm *Cur Deus Homo* 20-26; Anselm “Why God Became Man” 5-9.

doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis" (hereafter cited as DSO¹¹² – all citation to this work are from COR¹¹³ [2002], the teaching of which in turn, left its mark on the definitive 1559 Institutes).

The knowledge of ourselves cannot be separated from the knowledge of God (Inst. 1.1.1, 1539). And it is this perspective that distinguishes Christian from secular anthropology (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:275). One of the most basic principles of Calvin's anthropology, on which he repeatedly insists, is the distinction between human nature as originally created by God and, as it has now become, in its present fallen state (Inst. 1.15.1, 2.1.1). Human nature is in a miserable condition not because God made it that way but because of the fall of human beings.¹¹⁴

According to Calvin, human beings consist of body and soul and that of the two, the soul is the "nobler part" (Inst. 1.15.2). Indeed, he repeatedly echoed the Platonist talk of the soul being imprisoned in the immortality of the soul but that this is a gift of God, not (as in Platonism) an inherent immortality (DSO, 1543:264f.). Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, which Calvin sees as synonymous terms, an example of Hebrew parallelism. The image has been horribly deformed by human sin but is not totally lost. It is restored in Christ. From this, we can understand that it consists above all in righteousness and holiness (Inst. 1.15.3f.). Calvin also pays extreme homage to Paul on this subject by citing and quoting Ephesians (specifically 2:1) and other Pauline epistles in his sermons, commentaries and the *Summarium* (Inst. summary) in which he reiterated that we are spiritually *dead* because of our transgressions, brought about by the original sin.

Total depravity describes the effect of the fall of Adam and Eve on the entire humanity. It is an attempt to describe what is otherwise known as the "original sin." Where some theologians

¹¹² Abbreviation for Calvin's *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*.

¹¹³ Abbreviation for *Calvini Opera Omnia denuo Recognita*.

¹¹⁴ For more discussion on this topic, see Selderhuis *ed et al Calvin Handbook* 275-288, in which he explained the state of humanity as originally created by God and fallen from sin through one man – Adam.

believed that human beings retained some capacity to please God, the Calvinists believe that human beings were incapable of pleasing God due to the radical effect of the fall on the totality of human nature. The Scots Confession (cited by UPC, 1970:3:3) took the extreme position that the fall eradicated the divine image from human nature: “By this transgression, generally known as original sin, ‘the image of God was utterly defaced in human beings,’ and they and their children became by nature, hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin.” Bullinger (cited by Pelikan, 1984:227; cf. also Law, 2001:141) was more outright when he said that the image of God in Adam was “extinguished” by the fall.

The Canons of Dort asserted the universality and the totality of the fall. That is, all of humanity was affected by the fall and every aspect of human existence was corrupted by the fall. “Therefore all human beings are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation” (Dort, 1619: 3rd & 4th head: art. 3). The Canons of Dort went so far as to reject the possibility that the unregenerate can hunger and thirst after righteousness on their own initiative. It insists this spiritual hunger is indicative of spiritual regeneration and only those who have been predestined for salvation will show spiritual hunger (Dort, 1619: 3rd & 4th head: par. 4).

In taking this stance, the Canons of Dort faithfully reflected on Calvin’s position and the other Reformers’ understanding of the fall. Calvin (1960:253) believed the fall affected human nature to the extent that human beings became utterly incapable of faith which is so necessary for salvation. He wrote, “Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole of man is overwhelmed – as by a deluge – from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin” (Inst. 2.1.9). Luther held a similar radical understanding of original sin. At the Heidelberg disputations, Luther (cited by Kittelson, 1986:111) asserted: “‘Free will’ after the fall is nothing but a word,’ and so long as it does what is within it, it is committing deadly sin.” The Calvinists and so do the Augustinians claimed that Pelagian’s views

on this matter are seen in modern day Evangelicalism, which denounces humanism as the enemy of Christianity but holds to a “humanistic” view of human free will (Fanning, 2009:7).

5.3.1.3 *Unconditional election for divine predestination controversy (U)*

The first article of TULIP describes our fallen state (total depravity); the second article however, describes God, the author of our salvation (unconditional election). The emphasis here is on the transcendent sovereignty of God whose work of redemption is totally independent of human will. That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree (Dort, 1619: 1st head: art. 6). Calvin (1960:931, 932) likewise affirms unconditional election through his rejection of the idea that our election is based on God’s foreknowing our response. He writes, “We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon His freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by His just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment, He has barred the door of life to those whom He has given over to damnation” (Inst. 3.21.7, 3.22.1). In another note, Calvin (1960:320) used medical analogy to describe double predestination; “Therefore, though all of us are by nature suffering from the same disease, only those whom it pleases the Lord to touch with His healing hand will get well. The others, whom He, in His righteous judgment, passes over, waste away in their own rottenness until they are consumed. There is no other reason why some persevere to the end, while others fall at the beginning of the course” (Inst. 2.5.3). Although the doctrine of total depravity is listed first, it is not the logical starting point of the TULIP. The real starting point is in the second article, unconditional election. God’s transcendent sovereignty is the true starting point of Calvin’s soteriology. Barth (1922:117-118) argued that it is Calvin’s insistence on God’s absolute sovereignty which characterizes Calvin’s theology; double predestination is but a logical outworking of this fundamental premise.

According to Calvin (cited by Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:321), we can approach God only in humility. We can only be in awe of His greatness, since it is beyond human understanding. First, it is a clear reference to God’s eternal counsel prior to the foundation of the world; second, God’s mercy is so great that we can only comprehend it soteriologically. Hence, “elected” (cf.

Inst. *summarium*) means that He pulled His chosen out of the general condemnation of humanity caused by Adam's fall and led us to our Lord Christ. The phrase "in Him" (Eph 1:4) means through His election. Third, condemnation is mentioned, but its cause is not discussed. Rather, the argumentation is on a personal level. We would have been the condemned if God had not made His goodness available to us and had not separated us from the condemned. There are condemned people, but they are not the subject under discussion – but the elect. Fourth, sanctification absolutely follows upon election. We are not worthy, but God makes us more "acceptable" (as we were in the beginning). Calvin, however, did not invent the notion of double predestination. It was first found in Augustine and Gottschalk and was revived by Bradwardine – his advocacy of it may be read in a variety of his writings which certainly popularized the idea in the Reformed tradition. As is evident from the definitions of election and reprobation, the Canons are also formulated in a clear infralapsarian sense,¹¹⁵ elected from the fallen human race, or left in their misery (Sinnema, 2011:87-103).

Scholars have differed on whether Calvin was supralapsarian or infralapsarian.¹¹⁶ It, however, is incorrect to limit his position to such category, since this issue was not formulated in terms of these alternatives until Beza, the first to present a clear supralapsarian position (Sinnema, 2007:225-229). While Calvin spoke of God predestining human beings before they were created or fallen (Inst. 2.12.5, 3.23.7), in other passages he spoke in a more Augustinian fashion of God electing and reprobating from the condemned mass of perdition (Inst. 3.23.3). Calvin never presented his ideas on predestination in terms of an order of decrees nor did he seek to identify the "object" of predestination, the two classic ways that the issue was formulated. Since this was not an issue for him, Calvin cannot be regarded to have influenced the Canons' infralapsarian formulation.

¹¹⁵ Calvin's "infra lapsus" means "below" or after fall, Beza's "supra lapsus" means "above" or before the fall, see Sinnema 2011 *Church History and Religious Culture* 87-103; to address the vexing notion that God had created human beings to destroy them, see Kitzinger "The Reformed Theologian" 25-39.

¹¹⁶ Those who consider Calvin as supralapsarian include Klaas *De Strijd over Infra* 25, Doney *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* 213, and Fesko *Diversity within the Reformed Tradition* 81-139; others who consider Calvin as infralapsarian include Blocher 1980 *LRR* 270-276 and Turretin "Institutes of Elenctic Theology" 349-350.

5.3.1.4 *Limited atonement in the universalism controversy (L)*

One of the more controversial assertions in the Canons of Dort is the doctrine of limited atonement – in which Christ died only for the elect, not for the whole world. It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and “those only,” who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father (Dort, 1619: 2nd head: art. 8). Whereas the Canons of Dort is explicit in its affirmation of limited atonement, surprisingly a careful reading of Calvin’s Institutes does not yield any explicit mention of limited atonement (one has to consult Nicole’s article, 1985 for this).

There are a number of biblical passages that can be used to refute the doctrine of limited atonement. Biblical references commonly used to challenge the Calvinistic position tend to be those that teach God’s desire for all to be saved; for example, John 3:16 NIV; “For God so loved ‘the world’ that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Another important passage is the first epistle of Paul to Timothy 2:3-6 NIV: “This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants ‘all men’ to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth; For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for ‘all men.’”

Another significant passage that unequivocally challenges the notion of limited atonement is the first epistle of John 2:2 NIV: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the ‘whole world.’” This passage is especially relevant for two reasons: (1) it specifically refers to Christ’s atoning death on the cross; and, (2) it teaches that Christ died, not just for the elect but also for the non-elect (the whole world). Calvin cited the first epistle of John 2:2 three times, but what is surprising is that nowhere in his Institutes did Calvin deal with the

latter part of the verse. The biblical reference index at the back of the Institutes shows that the first epistle of John 2:2 is cited three times (cf. McNeill, 1960).¹¹⁷

The real challenge for those who appeal to the above passages lies in the semantic tactics used by Calvinists in which they argue that “all” and “the world” is not to be taken literally, but rather referring to only those predestined for salvation. Zacharias Ursinus, a German Reformer, understood “all” to refer to “all classes” rather than to individuals (see Pelikan, 1984:237). Similarly, Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Calvin’s colleague and successor, insisted that John 3:16 applied only to the elect (see Olson, 2017: par. 5). Nicole’s (1985: par. 29-30) explanation describes the Calvinists’ strategy for reading biblical texts:

For instance, “all” may vary considerably in extension: notably “all” may mean, all men, universally, perpetually and singly, as when we say “all are partakers of human nature”; or again it may have a broader or narrower reference depending upon the context in which it is used, as when we say “all reached the top of Everest,” where the scope of the discourse makes it plain that we are talking about a group of people on which set out to ascend the mountain. It is not always easy to determine with assurance what the frame of reference is in view.

In the previous chapters, we have learned that exegesis works when, according to Carson (2011), we think like the author of the passage, apostle John for instance in John 3:16, and place ourselves in the author’s stead so that we can better understand the passage. He said that John’s meaning of the word “world” is the morality rebellion of the world, not as the entire human race in the world. The Reformed tradition thus insists that the blood of Christ is sufficient to all and efficient only to the elect.¹¹⁸ The excellent and well-known Calvinistic defence on this subject is the two sides of God’s redemption which are the *καταλλάσσω*¹¹⁹ or known as the “common grace” and the *ἰλάσκομαι* known as “particular grace”.¹²⁰ *Καταλλάσσω* is sufficient to all human beings which Universalists believe. But the *ἰλάσκομαι* is efficient to only those elected from the foundation of the world.¹²¹ Van Genderen and Velema (2008:482) said of this matter, “Our redemption was a matter of blood and tears for our Mediator. Our redemption cost God a great deal.” Bonhoeffer (1959:43-45) likewise, defended God’s redemptive work – that we

¹¹⁷ Inst 2:17:2, 3:4:26, and 3:20:20.

¹¹⁸ Already discussed in ch 3: Calvinistic grace.

¹¹⁹ Already concluded in ch 2: Pauline grace.

¹²⁰ See Bavinck 1989 *CTJ* 35-65.

¹²¹ See Kuyper *Particular Grace* 4.

should not cheapen it by just inserting human ability whether to choose or reject the grace He bestowed. God is a God of order; He neither gambles nor makes mistakes. He does not do any wrong, nor is He one to unwarily revise His plans. He is God. His plan is perfect. Indeed, He gave His grace both to everyone (world) and to the elect. Grace is sufficient to all but atonement is limited only to the elect.

5.3.1.5 *Irresistible grace in the human freedom controversy: free-will and the Monotheletism heresy (I)*

Calvinists' defence against the Monotheletism heresy¹²² is highly influenced by anthropological understanding. Calvin's opponents thrive on the idea of human self-centeredness in boasting and insisting that salvation may be had through human will. This assertion is made on the basis that the doctrine of the incarnation rests on what constitutes the divine nature and what constitutes human nature. Hence, a defective anthropology leads to a defective Christology and soteriology.

Do fallen human beings retain free choice? The fall certainly did not destroy the will. The will remains, but is however enslaved and depraved (Inst. 2.2.12, 2.3.5, 1539). But does the will have freedom of choice? The answer must depend on how "will" is defined. Calvin¹²³ was certainly not keen on the term. In his sermons it is always portrayed as an error of the papists. In a commentary, he ironically stated that the origin of *liberum arbitrium* is that Adam wanted to be independent. In the Institutes, however, his position is subtler. Calvin¹²⁴ was prepared to accept the term "*liberum arbitrium*" if it was used not in the sense of "*libera boni aequae ac mali election*" but to affirm that it is by will and not by coercion that we act wickedly. But he considered free choice far too grand a title for such a small thing when we are the (voluntary) slaves of sin. Furthermore, the term has been so abused that most people imagine it to mean

¹²² Monotheletism asserted that Christ had only one will – the divine; Bithetism affirmed that Christ had two wills – human and divine working in harmony; in the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III, rejected Monotheletism in favour of Bithetism, for an informed discussion of the theological debates surrounding the Monotheletism heresy, see Weaver 1975 *RP* 400-403.

¹²³ Comm on Gn 2:9.

¹²⁴ Inst 2:2:7f, 1539.

that human beings are “master of both their own minds and wills, able of their own power to turn themselves toward either good or evil.” One solution is to explain the true meaning of the term, but human propensity to falsehood is such that the error dormant in one word can outweigh the truth in a whole discourse of clarification. Calvin’s advice is to drop the term in order to avoid the danger, but if any wish to retain the term without the error they are free to do so.

Calvin’s reply to Pighius repeatedly affirmed that he was not scrupulous about words as long as the substance is correct.¹²⁵ He had no objection to calling the will free “in the sense of not being coerced nor forcibly moved by an external impulse but moving of its own accord (*sponte*).” Indeed, to deny this would be heresy (DSO 137). But Pighius and others understood the term to mean that the will “has both good and evil with its power, so that it can, by its own strength, choose either one of them.” In this sense Calvin¹²⁶ firmly rejected the term, and it was because of this abuse that he preferred it dropped. He also argued that since the Scripture declares the human will to be in bondage, it is thus improperly be said to be free.

To avoid confusion, Calvin (cited by Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:281-282) defined his terms carefully. According to popular understanding, a free (*libera*) will has it in its power to choose good and evil. A coerced (*coacta*) will is one which “does not incline this way or that of its own accord or by an internal movement of decision but is forcibly driven by an external impulse.” Such a will cannot exist, for it would be a contradiction in terms. By contrast, a will is self-determined (*spontanea*) when “of itself (*ultro*), it directs itself in the direction in which it is led, when it is not taken by force or dragged unwillingly.” Finally, that will is bound (*serva*) “because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord (*sponte*) and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse.” According to these definitions, all has a choice (*arbitrium*) and the same is self-determined. We commit evil of our own voluntary choosing (*voluntariae suae* election) – coercion and violence are excluded as inconsistent with the nature of the will. But the choice is

¹²⁵ A summary and analysis of Pighius’ position is found in the published dissertation of Schulze, Schulze *Calvin’s Reply to Pighius*.

¹²⁶ See DSO 137.

not free because it is driven to the evil of necessity, by innate human wickedness, and cannot seek anything but evil. Because of its corruption, the will is “held captive under the yoke of sin and of necessity and therefore wills in an evil way.” Thus, bondage brings necessity, but is nonetheless a voluntary rather than coerced bondage (DSO 137-139). The fallen sins freely and their sins are the expression of their true character, and in that senses they are fully free. But they are not free in the sense of being poised between good and evil in some sort of moral neutrality.

The fall affects the intellect as well as the will. Fallen human intellect has become blind and unable to discover the truth, just as the will is corrupted and unable to love God or obey Him (DSO 201). As a result of the fall, not just the will but also the mind is in bondage (DSO 167). Here Calvin¹²⁷ appeals to the distinction between our natural gifts, which were corrupted by sin, and supernatural gifts, which were lost due to the fall of humanity. He distinguished between the understanding of earthly and heavenly things. When it comes to secular disciplines, such as “government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts,” fallen human beings can excel. Their achievements should be accepted ungrudgingly as gifts from God. But when it comes to theology, to “the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom,” it is quite another matter (Inst. 2.2.13, 1539). There “the greatest geniuses [such as Plato] are blinder than moles” (Inst. 2.2.18, 1539).

5.3.1.6 Perseverance of the saints and righteousness by faith in the hyper-grace controversy (P)

5.3.1.6.1 Cooperation with grace

Medieval Catholic theology, following Augustine, distinguished between operating and cooperating grace. Initially, (operating) grace converts the (human) will from evil to good. The converted will then desires the good and so works together with (cooperating) grace (Lane,

¹²⁷ Inst 2:2:12.

1981:84). Calvin¹²⁸ was extremely suspicious of the concept of cooperating grace, as he found it in Peter Lombard (Colish, 1994:383). Why was he so suspicious? There were three errors that medieval theology had built on the concept.

First, the idea of cooperating grace suggests that grace is not efficacious. Calvin¹²⁹ feared the view that we can choose whether to accept or spurn initial grace. This was how Pighius took it, maintaining that we already cooperate at the point of conversion and that God gives initial grace only to those who cooperate with it (DSO 275f.). Against this, Calvin¹³⁰ emphasized prevenient efficacious grace, which, in Augustine's words, "works without us to cause us to will."

Second, cooperation with grace implies the attendance of human merit, which is how Pighius took it. Calvin's¹³¹ point is not that the human will is inactive – "we willingly allow that people act, but it is because God causes them so to do" – but that when we obey God, we do not do so by some independent power of our own cooperate with Him. It is throughout the Christian life, not just at the beginning, that God works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Phlp 2:13). We act only to the extent that we are acted upon (DSO 252-257).

Third, cooperation with grace implies that the gift of perseverance is given according to how we cooperate with grace, which in turn would make us masters of our own destiny, rather than God alone. Against this, Calvin¹³² affirmed that the effective operation of grace is not confined to the beginning of the Christian life but that perseverance to the end is no less a gift of God. Perseverance should be seen as a gift of God, and it is a serious error to say that it is given in response to our merit, according to how receptive we are of initial grace (Inst. 2.3.11, 1539). Calvin¹³³ repeatedly cited Augustine to the effect that while Adam, before the fall, was given grace sufficient to persevere should he so will, to the elect is given grace that also ensures that they do so will.

¹²⁸ Inst 2:2:6, 2:3:11-13, 1539.

¹²⁹ Inst 2:2:6, 1539.

¹³⁰ See DSO 195.

¹³¹ See DSO 320.

¹³² See DSO 209.

¹³³ DSO 324-328.

Despite these misgivings, Calvin was not totally opposed to the concept of cooperating grace. He was prepared to accept it in the Augustinian sense – “God, by co-operating, perfects that which by operating He has begun. It is the same grace but with its name changed to fit the different mode of its effect” (Inst. 2.3.11). He was happy with the idea that once we have been brought by God’s grace to obey righteousness we then are inclined to follow the further action of grace. While Calvin disliked the term merit, he was happy to concede that God rewards our good works. The Lord is pleased with the work He has begun in us and finds it acceptable, and so rewards it with further gifts of grace. But that does not mean that we by our own efforts have made God’s grace effective, nor should talk of reward obscure the fact that perseverance is a “free” gift of grace. We may rightly expect God’s reward in proportion to the use that we make of His grace, but we should realize that our making use of His grace is also a gift of God and that reward is based on God’s free benevolence (Inst. 2.3.11, 1539).

This is also spelled out against Pighius. Initially, God by His grace works “without us” towards turn us to Him. The Holy Spirit acts on our wills to turn them towards Him, but they remain our wills and it is by means of our wills that we act in doing good when His grace moves us and so it is fitting that part of the action is ascribed to us. God acts “with us” in the sense that “by the continuous supply of His aid, He assists, increases, and strengthens that power which He has granted us, both for the completion of each particular work and for final perseverance through life.” Calvin¹³⁴ compares initial and subsequent grace to the transformation of a wild olive tree into one that is fit to bear fruit, followed by action of the root, giving the olive the vigour to bear fruit.

In its ultimate sense, Calvin disliked the concept of cooperating grace. He rejected the idea that people needed to supplement God’s grace or that they can do “good” independently of grace. But he did not deny that people, moved by grace, willingly obey righteousness, do “good,” and are rewarded. In this sense, he did believe in cooperation with grace.

¹³⁴ See DSO 195f.

5.3.1.6.2 The Christian in glory

In this life, the Christian begins to make progress, but does not reach perfection. We begin to bear the image of Christ, through regeneration, but this image is not yet fully restored. We press forward to perfection, but we do not reach the goal before death (Inst. 3.3.9-11, 1539-1559). The struggle against sin is life-long. But in the age to come, salvation will be complete. It is then that our wills will be truly free. While Adam was created with the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*) the believer has the much greater gift of being unable to sin (*non-posse peccare*). This gift is already ours in part, but comes fully after the resurrection, when there will be no more sin (DSO 325f.).

Calvin¹³⁵ normally draws a contrast between deliverance from sin, which comes with death, and full perfection, which awaits the last day and the resurrection of our bodies. Why is it that death brings final deliverance from sin? Primarily, it is because of the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body. “If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison?” (Inst. 3.9.4, 1539) Calvin¹³⁶ was aware that the biblical concept of “flesh” did not simply refer to the body. “Whatever we have from nature, therefore, is flesh.” The works of the flesh include sins like ambition, which belongs to the highest faculties of the mind (cf. Comm. on Gl 5:19f). But nonetheless, he repeatedly identified the flesh with the body and saw the release of the soul from the body as its final deliverance from sin (Inst. 3.6.5, 1539). Thus, full freedom of the will comes at death, following the liberation of the soul from the body.

Calvin’s defence on this particular controversy may be summarized into the following:

- 1) Salvation is totally different to conversion; and,
- 2) Salvation is still God’s initiative to draw His flock to persevere in righteousness.

And, the Reformed theology of TULIP may be summarized into these components:

- 1) The knowledge of God; and,
- 2) The knowledge of ourselves (Inst. 1.1).

¹³⁵ Comm on 1 Cor 1:7f, 13:12.

¹³⁶ Inst 2:3:1, 1539.

5.3.2 The Five Solas: the five pillars of the Reformed tradition

This serves as the second Reformed Calvinistic defence.

5.3.2.1 Sola Scriptura against the Marcion heresy (SS)

The problem in Marcion's theory¹³⁷ is evidently seen in the Hyper-Grace movement.¹³⁸ They were observed to be dichotomizing God's covenant by separating the Old from the New Testament particularly the covenant of law from grace. This movement asserts that the law is completely obsolete in the light of John 1:17 NIV, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Calvin's understanding of the "covenant" is essential to his doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* or the Scripture alone. Especially during his Strasbourg period, Calvin appears to have grappled intensely with the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. A fruit of this study is found in a comprehensive chapter of the Institutes of 1539 in which he explains the close connection of both Testaments as a dynamic unity with internal differences (CO 1:225-244).

In the Institutes of 1559, the doctrine of one covenant is finally completely integrated into his soteriology; and at the same time, this interpretation of the covenant became the connecting link in Calvin's theology, particularly between his Christology and his exegesis (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:238). The similarity or unity of the two Testaments is treated in the Institutes book two chapter ten. It is constructed of three factors. First, it is adoption "into the hope of immortality," which was as available to the Jews in the Old Testament times as it is for Christians; second, the covenant was always a covenant of grace, and the continuation of *Sola Gratia* spans both Testaments; and, third, fellowship with God and participation in God's promises depend entirely on the mediation of Christ in both the Old and New Testaments. The Father also "had and knew Christ as their Mediator" (Inst. 2.10.2; Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:237-239).

¹³⁷ It is the old heresy of Marcion who said that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament and the Old Testament should not be part of the Christian canon.

¹³⁸ The Grace-revolution movement, already discussed in ch 4: the grace debate.

The five differences that Calvin names are articulated in the Institutes book two chapter eleven. These are the result of how God adjusts His word to serve His salvation pedagogy. Thus, the spiritual promises in the Old Testament times are more directly and clearly articulated (Inst. 2.11.2). The first and the second differences are similar with the “ceremonies” of the “old” covenant. Here, Calvin reminds his readers of the distinctions in Hebrews 10:1 between the “shadow of good things that are coming” and the “realities themselves,” and the distinction in Colossians 2:17 between “a shadow of the things that are to come” and the “body” that identifies with Christ. The fifth difference also belongs to this line of thought, but the difference lies in the calling of all nations and crossing the borders of Israel in the time of the “gospel” (Inst. 2.11.11). The third difference is the one between “the letter” and “the Spirit” (Inst. 2.11.7-8). And the fourth difference, the one between “slavery” and “freedom” (Inst. 2.11.9), which became entirely relative, given the background of the single godly act of salvation. Indeed, Calvin¹³⁹ can agree with an antithetical positioning of the law and gospel, similar to that of Luther and Melancthon, if it implies two different paths of salvation for the sinful person. “But the gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows.” The doctrine of law fittingly carries the title, “Christ, although He was known to the Jews under the law, was at length clearly revealed only in the gospel” (Inst. 2.9).¹⁴⁰

The following is mostly from the Belgic Confession and the Scripture itself. Steyn and Coetzee (2017:6) wrote about John 17:3 NIV, “Now this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” They say that “to know that the Lord is life, is a key note to the passage and thus, to hearing God’s living word. That it is a life begins with God revealing Himself through His word and in this way, God teaches us what is true, good and right for this life. For this reason, it is good for us to live through the Scripture alone.” The question from the Belgic Confession is how God makes Himself known to us. “We know Him by two

¹³⁹ Inst 2:9:4.

¹⁴⁰ For more articles about Calvin’s understanding of the law and grace, see Hesselink 1998 *EQ* 163-165; Moon *Christus Mediator Legis* 89-107; and Hesselink 2012 <http://ngtt.journals.ac.za>

means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to perceive clearly God's invisible qualities – namely His eternal power and divine nature, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are sufficient to convict human beings and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation” (BC, 1567: art. 2; see also Ps 19:2; Eph 4:6; 1 Tm 2:5; Dt 6:4; Mt 2:4; 1 Cor 1, 8:4, 6, 12; 12). The Belgic Confession further affirms the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. In its article 3, “the written word of God confesses... this word of God did not come by the impulse of human, but that human beings spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pt 1:21). Thereafter, in His special care for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the Law. Therefore, we call such writings holy and the divine Scriptures (BC, 1567: art. 3; see also Ex 24:4, 31:18, 34:27; Ps 102:19, Hab 2:2, Rv 1:11, 1:19; 2 Tm 3:16).

The Belgic Confession also regrets Marcion's theory. The article four of the Belgic Confession articulates that the Holy Scriptures consist of two parts: the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.¹⁴¹ It is important to name the number of the canonical books - 66 (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament) all in all, against adding or extra apocryphal books (BC, art. 6).

5.3.2.2 *Sola Gratia for conversion (SGr)*

The bound (human) will cannot make any move towards goodness. Conversion comes by God's grace alone [*Sola Gratia*] and is solely His work (Inst. 2.3.5-9, 1539-1559). It involves a new creation in which our heart of stone is transformed into a heart of flesh. There is a total transformation and renovation of our wills. God does not merely assist the weak-willed, He

¹⁴¹ For the lists of the Canonical books, see BC art 4.

works in us to will the good (Inst. 2.3.6, 1539). “The mind of the human being is blind until it is illuminated by the Spirit of God [and] the will is enslaved to evil, and wholly carried and hurried to evil, until corrected by the same Spirit” (CO 7:594).

Grace is prevenient – it precedes all our good works. “God begins His good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing our hearts to righteousness” (Inst. 2.3.6f., 1539). Prevenient grace is not merely sufficient, bringing to the human will “freedom of contrary choice.” Calvin¹⁴² is aware of and rejects what would later be known as the Arminian view, that God “offers light to human minds, and it is in their power to choose to accept or to refuse it, and He moves their wills in such a way that it is in their power to follow His movement or not to follow it.” God does not merely offer us grace and leave it up to us whether to accept or resist it. Instead, conversion is “entirely the work of grace,” and God does not merely give us the ability to will the good but also brings it about that we will it (DSO 252f.).

The concept of *Sola Gratia* is often referred to as irresistible grace (I) a term which Calvinists later popularly used although Calvin himself did not use it. Irresistible grace can be compared to the statement “I could not resist him” in a trial for rape or in an account of how a woman has fallen in love. It is in the latter, not the former, sense that grace is called irresistible (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:283).

The following are passages that support *Sola Gratia*. Salvation is “of the Lord”; we are not saved by works of righteousness that we have done, but solely on account of the mercy given to us in God our Saviour (Tt 3:4-5). Grace excludes all boasting (Eph 2:9; Rm 4:4). We believe that God justifies the ungodly by trusting in His heart of compassion (Rm 4:1-8). God loves us with “an everlasting love” and draws us in His chase benevolence (i.e., His faithful love and kindness). As it is written, “I [God] love[s] you with an everlasting love; therefore, in chase I draw you to me” (Jr 31:3). Note that the word translated “I draw you” comes from the Hebrew word

¹⁴² See DSO 204.

ἄρᾳ, meaning to “seize” or “drag away” (the ancient Greek translation used the verb ἔλκω to express the same idea). As Jesus said, “No one is able to come to me unless he is “dragged away” (ἐλκύση) by the Father (Jn 6:44). God’s chesed [grace] seizes us, scandalizes us, takes us captive, and leads us to the Saviour. Spiritual rebirth is a divine act, neither of blood nor of the will nor of the flesh nor of the will of human, but of God” (cf. Jn 1:13). In everything – including human reason itself – the Lord God Almighty is preeminent. The Belgic Confession (1567: art. 14) explains the doctrine of *Sola Gratia*:

The creation: we believe that God created man of dust from the ground and He made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good righteous, and holy. His will could conform to the will of God in every respect.

The fall of human beings: but, when humans were in this high position, they did not appreciate it nor did they value their excellency. They gave ear to the words of the devil and wilfully subjected themselves to sin and consequently death and the curse. For they transgressed the commandment of life which they had received; by their sins they broke away from God, who was their true lives; they corrupted their whole nature. By all this they made themselves liable to physical and spiritual death.

Consequences of the fall: since human beings became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all their ways, they have lost all their excellent gifts which they had once received from God. They have nothing left but some small traces, which are sufficient to make humans inexcusable. For whatever light is in us has changed into darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (Jn 1:5); where the apostle John calls humanity’s darkness.

Implications: therefore, we reject all teaching contrary to this concerning human free will, since human beings are slaves to sin and can receive only what is given them from heaven. For, who dares to boast that she or he of themselves can do any good, when Christ says: No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him? Who will glory in [his or her] own will, when they understand that the sinful mind is hostile to God? Who can speak of her or his knowledge, since the human beings without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God? In short, who dares to claim anything, when they realize that we are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God?

Therefore, what the apostle [Paul] says must justly remain sure and firm: it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose. For there is neither understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and will of God unless Christ has brought it about; as He teaches us: apart from Christ we can do nothing.

(Also cited by Steyn & Coetzee, 2017:15-16)

Thus, Steyn and Coetzee (2017:15) taught that grace implies total loss and to live by grace alone is good.

5.3.2.3 *Sola Fide for Ordo Salutis (SF)*

Faith in Christ is the core of the creed of the church. It is the heart of the Christian doctrine. For this reason, Christology is the centrepiece of dogmatics (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:437).

In the exercise of Christian freedom, Luther distinguishes between the inner and outward person. To the inner person, he stresses that we are justified by faith alone (*Sola Fide*). It is only by faith that we become righteous, not by good works. Faith lays hold of God's promises, unites us to Christ and indeed even fulfils the law (in that it honours God, as the first of the Ten Commandments requires). Good works are not the means of becoming righteous but only the fruit of righteousness which becomes the result in the outer person of righteousness in the inner person. Works are to righteousness as fruit is to a tree. "Our faith in Christ frees us not from works but from false opinions about works – that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works" (Lane, 2007:157).

The principal problem in the doctrine of faith, in the soteriological sense, is the Evangelical order of salvation that "faith precedes regeneration". The same faulty foundation on faith has been popularly preached to most churches.

The topic of faith and justification are undeniably central in Calvin's thought, and his principal and most mature discussion of their characters are found in book III of the 1559 Institutes. There, the two topics are joined under the thematic umbrella of the appropriation of Christ's grace. Faith, as "the principal work of the Holy Spirit" (Inst. 3.1.4), is the means by which sinners receive Christ's grace. Justification and sanctification are hence, a "double grace" (Inst. 3.11.1), received by those who partake of Christ in faith. Together, these discussions answer the question concerning the proper knowledge of God posed at the beginning of Calvin's magnum opus: faith in Christ and justification by faith are the instruments through which sinners are brought to the right understanding of God's nature *pro nobis*. This speaks of how Calvin's particular treatment of faith and justification reflects his predilection to view the predicament of human fallenness in terms of false knowledge of God and the self (Tomkins, 2017).

In the second edition of the Institutes (1539), Calvin¹⁴³ defined faith as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise

¹⁴³ Inst 3:2:7.

in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” (*Divinae erga nos benevolentiae firmam certamque cogniitionem, quae gratuita in Christo promissionis veritate fundata per spiritum sanctum et revelatur mentibus nostris et cordibus obsignatur*, CO 1:455). Faith stands at the beginning of the lengthy consideration of the way in which Christ’s grace is received as well as the benefits and effects of that grace. Calvin¹⁴⁴ introduced the topic of faith as the Spirit’s principal work. Faith is thus explicitly treated as part of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as an illumination of the human mind and sealing of the heart with the truth of God’s goodness.

The fundamental assumption underlying Calvin’s definition of faith is that the main purpose and function of it is justification. Calvin’s prioritizing of justifying faith is directly linked to the central role of Paul in his thoughts. Undoubtedly, the view of faith in the Pauline epistles constitutes the most important source for Calvin’s understanding of faith. While the same might be said of any evangelical reformer, in Calvin’s case, it is interesting to note how this lens shapes his concept of faith. Paul, not only provided the general orientation towards saving faith, but he is also the authority that Calvin cited most frequently in describing faith. In addition, the view of faith articulated in the 1539 Institutes reflected the discussions of faith in Calvin’s commentary on Romans (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:292).

In his commentary on Romans, Calvin¹⁴⁵ identified justification by faith as the epistle’s central theme. Moreover, his comments particularly on chapters 3 and 4, articulate his Pauline understanding of faith as “certain knowledge of the divine mercy conceived from the gospel which brings peace of conscience before God and rest” (CO 2:13, 90). This Pauline understanding functions as a lens through which Calvin views other New Testament statements about faith, found, for example, in James, Hebrews, the first epistle of John, and the gospel of John, both in the Institutes and especially in his biblical commentaries. Sometimes these extra-Pauline passages appear in Calvin’s writings to supplement his assumptions about the primary

¹⁴⁴ Inst 3:1:4.

¹⁴⁵ Comm on Rm 4:14.

role of faith in justification, the relationship of faith with work or love, or faith as an explicit focus on Christ. Assuming that the Scripture cannot contradict itself, Calvin harmonizes these passages with his fundamentally Pauline presuppositions. As noted, in the final revision to the Institutes, other biblical views of faith manifest themselves to a greater degree and enrich a concept of faith that remains fundamentally Pauline. Without sacrificing the priority and centrality of saving faith directed towards God's redemptive work in the incarnate Christ, Calvin complements this logically prior and fundamental notion of faith with a richer portrayal of providential faith, which looks to God's creative and providential activity and directs itself toward the logos as eternal Son (Selderhuis ed. *et al.*, 2009:292; Pitkin, 1999:131).

The Holy Spirit does not instruct believers by rational proof but persuades them of divine truth. Faith is thus "a recognition" (*agnitio*) of God's will towards human beings and has, for Calvin, a distinct perceptual quality (Inst. 3.2.14). It is not a quality of the soul or a virtue, but a new way of seeing – not with external, carnal eyes but rather with inner, spiritual eyes. By faith, the person knows God in Christ to be one's own benevolent Father. That the fiducially character of faith has not been done away with though the adoption of the terminology of knowledge is more than evident. That the knowledge of faith is "firm" and "certain," has less to do with the individual believer's strength of conviction than with the divine origin and ground of faith. Ideally, faith would consist in constant persuasion or assurance of God's goodness, which is guaranteed through certain promises in Christ. However, Calvin¹⁴⁶ also acknowledges the reality of doubt and temptation in the life of faith: "Surely while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety." What distinguishes true faith from false faith is not the absence of doubt but rather the way it responds to it. Drawing on the example of David, Calvin argues that in the battle against unbelief, true faith always triumphs.

¹⁴⁶ Inst 3:2:17.

In 1543, Calvin¹⁴⁷ adds the following to his discussion: “Therefore we explain ‘justification’ as the acceptance with which God receives us into His favour as righteous ones. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and imputation of Christ’s righteousness.” (*Ita nos iustificationem simpliciter interpretamur acceptionem, qua nos Deus in gratiam receptos pro iustis habet Eamque in peccatorem remissione ac iustitiae Christi imputation positam esse dicimus*, CO 17:38). This summary underscores the forensic character of justification: according to Calvin, sinful human beings are reckoned righteous, not made actually righteous. Although they enjoy mystical union with Christ, Christ’s righteousness in justification is theirs only through imputation. In this edition, Calvin¹⁴⁸ also makes more explicit a Pauline view of justification as “reconciliation” (CO 1:739).

In 1539, the discussion of justification follows the discussion of repentance (*poenitentia*; chap. 5), which itself follows the chapter on faith and the creed (chap. 4). In the 1559 Institutes, Calvin retains this order of these three *loci*, but joins them together under one thematic umbrella of the work of the Holy Spirit. Justification and regeneration or repentance (sanctification) are thus linked intrinsically to faith, as all three are focused on the issue that guides the presentation in book III: the way in which Christ’s grace is received and the benefits and effects of that grace. Moreover, Calvin expands his discussion of justification in 1559 in order to render more precise his understanding of the specific character of justification regarding its relationship to regeneration and faith.

Apparently, these doctrines have something to do with the order of salvation (*Ordo Salutis*). The Calvinistic (or the Reformed tradition in general) order of salvation is always, “regeneration precedes faith,” not the other way around. The point is that justification is not a process or the mere beginning of a process that results in a real, qualitative change in the human soul that forms the basis of or contributes to divine acceptance. For Calvin¹⁴⁹ justification by faith entails that Christ’s righteousness is imputed not infused: “We see that our righteousness is not in us

¹⁴⁷ Inst 3:11:2.

¹⁴⁸ Inst 3:11:4.

¹⁴⁹ Inst 3:11:23.

but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ.” In the matter of acceptance before God, human righteousness is always worthless.

A key theme in Calvin’s discussion is that free justification apart from all human works or righteousness alone offers proper honour and glory to God while righteousness through works strips honour from God (Inst. 3.13.1-2). In addition, the issue of certainty is present throughout: to rely on oneself – one’s works or even the strength of one’s own faith – is to render salvation uncertain and leads to despair: “Believers should be convinced that their only ground of hope for the inheritance of a heavenly kingdom lies in the fact that, being engrafted into the body of Christ, they are freely accounted righteous. For, as regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God’s favour but receiving from Christ that which we lack” (Inst. 3.13.5).

Therefore, regeneration precedes faith and faith precedes good works which brings glory to no other than God as these are all work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ignites a sincere faith in the heart of the believers, faith that embraces Christ in all His merit and faith that is the means by which we are bound in the community to His benefits and to Him (BC, 1567: art. 22). We therefore rightly join Paul in saying that through faith alone, or through faith apart from the works of the law (Rm 3:28). The Belgic Confession (art. 23) implies that in our justification before God, we do not praise neither ourselves nor our merit in the least, but depend on the obedience of the crucified Christ alone.

5.3.2.4 Solus Christus in the late medieval soteriology and human-centred religion: The way of salvation (SC)

Reformed theology affirms that the Scripture and its teachings on grace and faith emphasize that salvation is *Solus Christus*, through “Christ alone” – that is, Christ is the only Saviour (Ac 4:12) (Beeke, 2016). Warfield (2005:140) wrote, “the saving power of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty Saviour on whom it rests” (also see DiMarco, M. & DiMarco, H., 2013:164).

When we discuss the Reformation slogan *Solus Christus*, it is important to understand the precise point of dispute. The Reformers did not reject the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of the person of Christ. Nicene Trinitarianism and Chalcedonian Christology, which address the person and identity of Christ, were not the issues of debate and disagreement. The theologians of the Reformed churches readily used the biblical and theological arguments of patristic and medieval theologians to defend traditional Trinitarianism and Christology (Mathison, 2016a). The problem, then, was not the person of Christ. The problem was the work of Christ. The debate centred on the sacramental system Rome had constructed – a system in which Christ's grace was mediated to the people through an elaborate system of priests and sacramental works. Through this sacramental system, the Roman Church effectively controlled the Christian's life from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction) and even beyond (masses for the dead). Luther (1483–1546) and the other Reformers realized that this elaborate system of works obscured the person and work of Christ as it was so clearly taught in the Scripture. Luther argued that the papacy, through this sacramental system, had usurped the prerogatives of Christ, making itself the dispenser of God's grace. Christ alone, and not the church, however, is our only Mediator (WLCQA 181). As Zwingli (cited by George, 2013:129) proclaimed, "Christ is the only way of salvation of all who were, are now, or shall be." In article 54 of his 67 articles (1523), Zwingli explicitly contrasted the Roman Sacramentalist view with *Solus Christus*: "Christ has borne all our pain and travail. Hence, whoever attributes to works of penance what is [supposedly] Christ's alone, errs and blasphemes God." The Westminster Confession of Faith (14.2) affirms that Christ alone is the object of our faith: "The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."

Mathison (2016a) says that the Reformers and their followers were intent on proclaiming "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). They recognized that because Christ is the only way of salvation for the human beings, He is central to the message of the Bible (Ac 4:12). Their books were Christ-centred. Their sermons were Christ-centred. Their worship was Christ-centred. All of these were in stark contrast to the human-centred religion of late medieval Roman

Catholicism. If we are to see a new Reformation in our day, we too must believe and confess the biblical doctrine of *Solus Christus*.

There are a number of literary works that can assist in our understanding of this doctrine that Mathison (2016a) has recommended. The following are merely a starting point. (1) “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” by Martin Luther. The Babylonian captivity of the Church is the second of three great treatises Luther wrote in 1520 as part of his attack on the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church (the others were, “To the Christian nobility” and “The Freedom of a Christian”). The Babylonian Captivity is Luther’s scathing criticism of the Roman Catholic sacramental system. It is the place to begin in any attempt to understand the importance of *Solus Christus*; (2) “The Institutes of the Christian Religion” by John Calvin. Calvin was a second-generation Reformer who emphasized *Solus Christus* as emphatically as Luther. In one sense, the entirety of his Institutes could be seen as an exposition of the idea of *Solus Christus*, but his section on the Roman Church and sacraments in book four is a must-read on the subject; (3) “The Canons of Dort”. The Canons of the Synod of Dort are part of the three forms of unity, the confessional standards for millions of Reformed Christians. They set forth a biblically grounded understanding of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone; (4) “Christ Alone” by Rosenblatt (1999). This little booklet provides a concise introduction to the doctrine of *Solus Christus*, explaining why it is crucial to the Christian faith; and, (5) “Is Jesus the Only Saviour?” by Nash (2010).

Today, another issue has arisen that is directly related to the idea of *Solus Christus* – the exclusivity of Christ as the only way of salvation. In our pluralistic world, this article of Christian faith has come under constant attack. This book by Nash is a defence of the exclusivity of Christ as the only way of salvation. In it he deals with the pluralistic and inclusivistic views of human beings such as John Hick, in which Jesus is seen as merely one way of salvation among many. This belief is more popularly called as the “New Age” belief.

“The Belgic Confession” (also cited by Steyn & Coetzee, 2017:35-37) also affirms the doctrine of *Solus Christus* where the function Christ as Messiah is acknowledged for the salvation of

human beings and their walk with God (cf. Phlp 2:6-11). First, the incarnation of the Son of God, confesses that Jesus Christ is truly our Immanuel – that is: “God with us”¹⁵⁰ (BC, art. 18).¹⁵¹ Second, the two nature of Christ as human and divine (BC, art. 19), confesses that “our Saviour had to be a sinless person to be able to pay for our sins. Our Saviour also needed to have the strength to bear God’s punishment. Therefore, our Saviour could be no other than the Son of God, who became human. This is the gospel that the Son of God became a real human being in order to deliver us from sin and inescapable death.” Third, the atonement or the satisfaction of Jesus Christ our High Priest (BC, art. 21), admits that He brought reconciliation between us [human beings] and God by bearing the punishment we deserved in His place. Without Christ, we would still have been enemies of God, but in Christ there is peace between us and God. We can only live on the basis of the atonement that Christ has brought about. Fourth, the intercession of Christ (BC, art. 26), confesses that “in Christ” we are new persons called to live a holy life. Nevertheless, we cannot be completely obedient on this side of the Second Coming. When we sin in weakness, we still have Jesus Christ as our advocate with the Father. Therefore, we can confess our sins confidently, knowing that Christ, our advocate, intercedes on our behalf. Indeed, in Christ alone we live because He came to live in our place.

5.3.2.5 *Soli Deo Gloria against self-centeredness in worship (SGI)*

“The greatest heresy in the Church today is that we think we are in the entertainment business. It is scarcely possible in most places to get a person to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God” (Tozer, 2006: par. 2). The reason why Arminian free-will is a heresy is that it gives self-glorification. It is always “I” or “oneself,” and it is always, human in competence with something or someone which makes minute and negligible the works of God, though God used them as they claim, they are responsible of their own act. This same sense may be observed in worship service, in which preachers usually adopt a second role, apart from preaching the word

¹⁵⁰ Mt 1:23.

¹⁵¹ Consult the full article (this also applies to the rest of the articles that have been extracted partially); BC art 18, also confesses against the heresy of the Anabaptists who deny that Christ assumed human flesh from his mother, that he “shared the very flesh and blood of children.”

of God, they seem to always point to the fact of the effect that they become heroes in their own sermons. Preachers are most prone to self-glorification when they stand on stage to supposedly preach on God; instead, preachers err when they begin to “testify” of their own works and efforts of, for example, building the church and their labours of it. Although such self-glorification, is not only limited to the pastors of a church, the glory and praise may be turned to a certain team in a church who has contributed a lot to the growth of the church, instead of highlighting God and the gospel where the worship service is used to magnify human effort. To have a wider audience, preachers tend to appeal to the people’s emotions and allow this priority to shape their sermons. Needless to say, entertainment and performance¹⁵² are not at all consistent with the spirit of worship, *Soli Deo Gloria* is (for the glory of God alone).

Soli Deo Gloria is not precisely parallel to the other *Solas* because in one sense, it is both the beginning and the end of the other four. The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures for the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God alone. Christ humbled Himself to the point of death and was raised and exalted to the right hand of the Father. Justification is by faith alone for the glory of God alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*, therefore, is fundamental. It is important to understand that when we talk about God’s glory, we are talking first and foremost about an attribute of God. As the Westminster Confession of Faith (2.2) explains, “God hath all life, ‘glory,’ goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself.” He is the God of glory (Ac 7:2), He manifests His glory in the works of creation and redemption, most significantly in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8). God also glorifies Himself in and through the church. We, as believers, are called to do whatever we do for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). We are to use our gifts to serve one another “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 4:10-11). The Psalms are filled with ascriptions of praise to the glory of God, and these demonstrate where the focus of the church’s worship should be. Worship does not exist for our entertainment or self-gratification. Worship exists for the glory of God alone.

¹⁵² See Hawkins 2010 <https://www.youtube.com>

Mathison (2016b) recommended a number of books that can help us grasp the significance of the doctrine of *Soli Deo Gloria*: (1) “How Do We Glorify God?” by Hannah (2000) in which the author explores the answer to the first issue in the Westminster Shorter Catechism that “human being’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever”; (2) “How Then Shall We Worship?” by Sproul (2013). In this book, Sproul outlines the principles of God-centred, God-glorifying worship; (3) “The Gospel Worship” by Burroughs (2003). Burroughs was a Puritan whose writings remain edifying and encouraging to this day. This book was enormously influential on Sproul (Sproul, 2017b); (4) “A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-centered worship” by Horton (2002). Horton’s book is a contemporary advocate of God-glorifying worship as opposed to worship treated as entertainment so common today in churches; (5) “Give Praise to God” by Ryken *et al.*, (2013). This is a helpful collection of short essays by different writers on various aspects of worship.

5.4 Overview presentation

Figure 4

Reformed Calvinistic doctrines of grace: Theological defences

On God’s sovereignty

5 points of Calvinism:	5 <i>Solas</i> of the Reformed Church:
(T) – Pelagian-anthropological controversy	(SS) – Marcion heresy
(U) – Conditional election controversy	(SGr) – Human-centred conversion
(L) – Universalism controversy	(SF) – <i>Ordo Salutis</i>
(I) – Free will controversy	(SC) – Late medieval soteriology
and Monotheletism heresy	and human-centred religion
(P) – Hyper-grace controversy	(SGI) – Self-centred worship
= Knowledge of God and self	= Christological-Soteriology

5.5 Conclusion

When it comes to theology, Calvin's thinking runs from God's revelation in (redemptive) history to the mysteries of the matter and not vice versa¹⁵³. This is manifested in his writings such as *The Institutes* and in his commentaries on Scripture. The grace debate may be condensed in two major mutually exclusive concepts: "human free-will" (Arminianians) and "God's sovereignty and human total depravity" (Calvinism). The "TULIP" and "Five *Solas*" were thus formulated by the Reformists to address the issues raised in the contentious topics in the debate.

The defence of the Reformists on the Five *Solas* is fundamentally Christological (having been established through a redemptive-historical interpretation of the Bible [*Sola Scriptura*]), and systematically soteriological (followed by the other *Solas*), which in turn is bound under the overarching principle of *Soli Deo Gloria*. Hence, the Five *Solas* is fundamental in the "Christological-Soteriology" understanding of the order of salvation.

We have also seen that the points in the TULIP are significantly hinged on the concept of God's sovereignty. TULIP results to the understanding and towards a "knowledge of God and [the] self" in the salvation narrative and in Christian living. The Five *Solas* are also ultimately founded on the doctrine of God's sovereignty. In that sense, the Reformed Calvinistic apologetics on the doctrine of grace can be summarized in a simple yet self-justifying phrase – God's sovereignty. Therefore, a failure to grasp a right understanding and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty is failure to correctly understand one or the rest of the doctrines of grace.

Human salvation is of God, its heart is God's will that centres in Christ's redemptive works, sealed by the Holy Spirit with the end view of ultimately giving all glory to God. In essence, the defence of Calvin on the doctrine of God's sovereignty, with regard the salvific act of grace, is ultimately due and for the purpose of giving glory to God alone.

¹⁵³ See Selderhuis *ed et al The Calvin Handbook* 254-255.

CHAPTER 6

THE RELEVANCE OF CALVIN AND THE GRACE DEBATE IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

6.1 Introduction

The Reformed apologetics on the doctrine of grace may summarily be categorized into two cardinal concepts – the sovereignty of God and the Christological-Soteriology in Christian living. This grace anatomy¹⁵⁴, presented systematically by Calvin in his writings and codified in the Synod of the Dort through the acrostic TULIP, when the theologians of the Synod formulated the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Remonstrants' Five Points of Arminianism (see Spencer, 1979:32; Theopedia, 2018), was institutionalized as a result of defending the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Church fathers¹⁵⁵. It was also concluded in chapter 2 of this study that Paul is the authority to the doctrine of God's grace and that the Scripture is the ultimate litmus in determining the truth and veracity of any teaching. Thus, in relying to these concepts, Reformed apologetics may be said to be fully committed to *Sola Scriptura*.

As gleaned in the previous chapters, it is safe to conclude that the grace debate boils down into two major issues: first, with regard the understanding or knowledge of God; and, second, the knowledge of ourselves. This study re-echoes Calvin's theology that our understanding of who God is reflects our understanding of ourselves. Calvin wrote, "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other".

¹⁵⁴ Termed as "an interconnected group of suggestions" or the faces of grace doctrine. Also used by Northrop Frye in some of his literatures (see Frye, N. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton University Press).

¹⁵⁵ Chapter 2 emphasized on the authority given to Paul by God to be the Apostle of Grace.

In this final chapter, an analysis as to the growth of the grace debate and its impact and dynamics in contemporary Christianity is presented. Here, we shall see the utter significance and influence of Calvin, and the other Reformist father, to the current discourse on grace and salvation. We shall study the significant changes in the grace discourse before as compared to the grace discourse today, if any, and how the grace narrative then influenced the grace narratives today. This chapter will also capture the current situation in which Calvinism is in (the previous chapters already presented its history) as well as its challenges ahead.

6.2 The Gospel Message

The gospel message may be encapsulated by the passage which Luther is famous to have referred to as the “heart of the Bible, the gospel in miniature.”¹⁵⁶

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
(Jn 3:16, NIV)

Packer (2008:66) says that the gospel’s message is “Christ and Him crucified; the message of man’s sin and God’s grace, of human guilt and divine forgiveness, of new birth and new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Paul, in his epistle to the Romans (see the first 11 chapters of Romans), wrote a lengthy exposition of the gospel and its message of justification and of the grace of God that makes us right with Him. Before introducing the concept of grace, Paul emphasized on human depravity (Rm 3:10-18) and why sinners deserve to be meted with the punishment of God’s wrath (Rm 1:18-32; cf. Is 64:6). Through his exposition of human frailties, Paul showed how much sinners needed the gospel message by introducing the need for God’s righteousness (Rm 3:21-22) and this righteousness is given freely (Rm 4:9), out of God’s grace through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Eph 2:8-9). Pfeiffer (1975) said that “the central truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for sinners through the gift of His Son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers a

¹⁵⁶ See Drury 2006 <http://www.drurywriting.com>

share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The gospel is good news because it is a gift of God, not something that must be earned by penance or self-improvement.”

As simple as it may seem to understand the gospel, its message has been the centre of contentions throughout history; its believers have been persecuted for professing its message; wars have been waged and nations were divided due to the adherence to the truth of the gospel message. Various debates have been held which resulted to a quagmire of ideas bordering to fundamentalism, conservatism and radicalism, which in turn resulted to the division of churches, birth of doctrinal sects, the institution of other religions (Ferguson, 1990; 2003:619) and even the falling away of some from the faith.

6.2.1 Perspectives on the gospel message

In the previous chapters, we concluded that the good news of salvation by grace is an awareness of God’s sovereign will. The realization that God has shown us the highest kind of love by sending His only begotten Son, may be the common denominator in the grace debate. To answer the extent as to how much we should depend on God requires an inquiry through an anthropological tracing of human condition after the fall and before salvation. In contemporary Christianity, the idea that God loves us all is not at all debatable. It is generally and widely accepted. Although this is undeniably true, it is not however the only truth, it is only partially true. When preached as is and independently, it will not reflect the full truth of the gospel which in effect will not reflect the truth. By euphemizing the gospel truth and declaring only that God heals us, God saves us from poverty, and God prospers us by His grace, although true to a certain extent, the church is however setting aside the truth of God’s justice in treating human depravity which results to no better understanding of the human condition. This denies the realization of the gravity of God’s grace which brought forth salvation (revisit chap. 4:4.2; chap. 5: introduction, 5.3.1.2; see also Anselm, 2005:23, 126).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ *Cur deus homo* is a compilation of questions about God’s justice by Saint Anselm of Canterbury. It may also be compared to the “Satisfaction theory of atonement;” these classical literatures expose

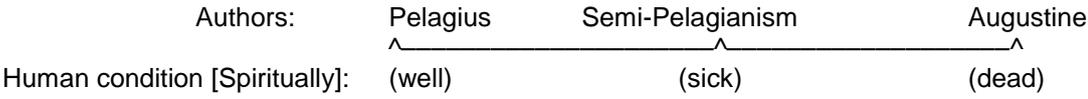
The understanding of God's gift of salvation and the intricate shaping of His plan of salvation are the very reasons why He allowed the gospel to be preached and taught, such that all may come to know of His great love to all and His gift of grace. More important is for us to be apprised of the human condition prior to and after salvation. The sinner's failure to meet the Lord's standard of perfection is an essential part of the gospel message. The covenant of works shows His perfect standard as a Holy God. Jesus did not come primarily to give us happiness or enjoyment or to bring us wealth and prosperity in the mundane sense. He came to give righteousness to us which would overcome eternal death and make us worthy of the new heaven and earth (2 Cor 5:21; 2 Pt 3:13). He came to defeat death itself and give us a place in the heavens. He came to clothe us with righteousness because we, sinners ourselves, cannot attain the standard of God for us to earn a place in the heavens. To realize God's unattainable standards are fundamental thus to the understanding and appreciation of the depth and gravity of His grace to us.

The gospel is the narration of God's grace. It is literally the good news from God (1 Cor 15; Rm 3:20-24). That good news is the salvation that God gives to His people. Scripture says that salvation cannot be earned by human effort because human sacrifices can never live up to the standard of God's requirement of holiness and righteousness, because the human heart is indelibly stained with sin and sin is always appalling to God. The fall of the first man is the sin that etched its way into every human heart; not the individual actions that we, consciously or not, regularly commit contrary to the laws of God (Vorster, 2010:71-89). The sins that we do are mere manifestations of the sin fully alive within us. The gospel reveals that the human heart is full of frailties due to sin and its own pursuit will always end up empty, frustrated, and destitute – human beings are doomed to eternal damnation because of the original sin ingrained within us. The human frustration to reach salvation and perfection manifest into an empty life where nothing earthly will ultimately bring satisfaction to the human heart (Anselm, 2005:20, 39). The

the absence of God's justice to human sin in today's gospel, i.e.: "how the devil had no justice on his side against human beings; and it was, that they seemed to have had it, and why God could have freed human beings in this way," "how Christ's life is paid to God for the sins of humanity, and in what sense Christ ought, and in what sense He ought not, or was not bound, to suffer?"

relationship between humanity and God was severed. Sin alienated and separated us from God (Is 59:2, Jr 6:8, Eph 2:12, 2 Th 1:9). And when we are separated from God, our own efforts and our own good works can never rebuild that bridge to connect us to God. This impossible condition to stand before God as we are, Christ has completely cured through His death on the cross (Gl 3:13; 1 Pt 2:24, 3:18). His gift-offering allowed us to stand before God clothed with the blood of Christ – the cloth of righteousness (Rm 8:10); and for this reason, Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant – that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15). The good news, the gospel, is that God’s people no longer have to frustrate the ends of human effort to earn salvation, because it is God Himself who offered it through His Son – Jesus Christ, who is able to rebuild the life in that sacred relationship with God (Rm 8:1-17).

We look back to chapter 4 of this study where three perspectives on the human condition prior salvation were presented.



Gore (2016), in his lecture on the Pelagian controversy, added to the category, he identified a fourth condition – that is, human beings as “radically corrupted” because of sin. This condition was originally taught by Wesley (1856:37). It is a concept of Christian anthropology that compromises Semi-Pelagianism and Augustinian perspective on human condition. Thus, this spectrum began from 400 AD, from the time of Pelagius up to the 17th century, when the history of the Calvinist-Arminian debate began, and was passed on to contemporary Christianity (cf. Sell, 1998:1-26; OER, 1996).

We have previously established that the perspectives on human condition is primary in the formulation of the different faiths of their viewpoints on the extent of whether human will and God’s sovereignty can or cannot be synced to achieve salvation (the debate on total depravity

and human condition may be seen in chapter 4 of this study).¹⁵⁸ While the topic is fundamental, if not the central contention in the debates on salvation, it however lacked discourse because of the shift towards a general application of God’s love for all. Webster (2009:14), in vilifying such feel-good teachings, wrote as a criticism to Barna (1988:1f.), that a preaching focused only on exclaiming God’s love for everyone without showing the sinfulness of man, is a mere systematic church marketing strategy, which today’s churches are occupied with. He adds that churches today are busy with formulating sermons to “portray [that] the Christian life is an attractive, relevant, compelling lifestyle.”

The lack of acknowledgment of the human condition before and after salvation, eventually leads to a lack of realization and appreciation of the gravity of the works of Christ and their implication to us human beings. It does not only short-change the offering of Christ on the cross but cheapens His death and His gift to us (Bonhoeffer, 1959:43-45).

John 3:16 NIV, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son ...” shows how God demonstrated His unconditional love to humanity. The same is the manifestation of the grace which Paul taught. Jesus’ death on the cross is the pinnacle of divine love. How we rate God’s grace for the salvific purpose is how we see His love for us.

We may theoretically and categorically quantify the human conditions through a spectrum with respect to their corresponding need for God’s love and grace for salvation through the following:

Table 3

Quantification of the essentials for salvation

Perspectives	Human condition	The needed grace of God	The needed love of God
Pelagian	Well	0%	0%
Semi-Pelagian	Sick	50%	50%
Wesleyan	Radically Corrupted	99%	99%
Augustinian	Dead	100%	100%

¹⁵⁸ This debate started from the Pelagian controversy up to Augustine’s biblical apologetics on Eph 2:1, “We are dead in our transgressions and sins.”

The Augustinian belief that human beings are totally corrupted; that we cannot contribute anything whatsoever, nor can we entirely cooperate with God, as a consequence of the fall of man, means that nothing [0%] can be credited to us (Augustine, 1953:219, 381). There cannot be anything attributed to anyone who is dead in spirit, who is nil in capacity to proceed to salvation. If none therefore is ascribed to one who is spiritually dead, it is a concession to one's total inability to contribute to salvation. Acknowledgement of this fact arrests us into a desperate need to a source whom we can turn to, since there is nothing in us to save us from damnation. This imperative plea to a God who has everything in Himself, in contrast to our desperation, allows God to consume us with the fullness of His love without any reservation, because we have nothing left for ourselves. Our nothingness allows the fullness of God in us to bring about our salvation. Therefore, we cannot attribute anything to ourselves but everything [100%] only to God.

The Pelagian perspective that human-will, as a creation of God, is sufficient by itself to achieve a sinless life (Rees, 1991:36-38, 43), will eventually result to a realization that we have the capacity to achieve salvation for ourselves. This advances the idea that a sinner is capable to make the effort to choose to do something that will eventually add up to his/her salvation. Hence, discretion is fully human. With this fullness of human being in salvation, there is left no room for the fullness of God. There cannot be any space left for anything when claim to be full. God becomes an external being who may or may not play a role in our salvation, depending on our choices to allow God to act in our lives or not. Therefore, with human choosing, total ability is wrested in us human beings and leaves God helpless, on the side lines, who may act only when we choose to allow Him to. God's glory is not therefore fully served.

Semi-Pelagianism teaches a cooperation between human faith and God's grace [hence the 50–50% rating] (Weaver, 1996:15). By the term “cooperation” itself, meaning a “joint-effort,” one is needed for the other to fulfil a purpose. Hence, without human initiative to accept salvation, God cannot apply His grace nor work out His plans for creation. In the same manner, without God's grace, we are not able to achieve the Christian life. This notion, however divides the glory

between sinners and God. Ultimately, God cannot be given the full credit, if human beings also have a share in it.

In his journal, Wesley (1828:560) wrote, “I think on justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years, and just as Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him a hair’s breadth.” While it may seem that Wesley also, believed in human sinfulness, as Calvin (influenced by Augustinian view) and his followers so too believed, Wesley and the Arminians’ perspective is a hair’s breadth away from that of Calvin’s view that human beings are totally depraved because of sin, and therefore, they are spiritually dead. For Wesley and his fellow Arminians, human beings are indeed sinful that is in bondage to sin such that we cannot freely act with faith apart from God’s grace (cf. Olson, 2009:137-157). However, the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace nullifies the implications of total depravity (Schreiner, 2000:232-233). Brathcher (2017) gives a simple yet accurate comparison between the Calvinist-Augustinian perspective and that of Wesleyan-Arminian perspective on human condition.

Table 4

Comparative juxtaposition between Calvinist-Augustinian anthropology and Wesleyan-Arminian anthropology

<p style="text-align: center;">John Calvin Foundation laid by Augustine</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">John Wesley Foundation laid by Arminius</p>
<p>Total depravity – Human beings are so affected by the negative consequences of original sin that they are incapable of being righteous and are always and unchangeably sinful; human freedom is totally enslaved by sin so we can only choose evil.</p>	<p>Deprivation (radically corrupted) – Human beings are sinful and without God, incapable (deprived) on their own of being righteous; however, they are not irredeemably sinful and can be transformed by God’s grace; God’s prevenient grace restores to humanity the freedom of will.</p>

Wesley (cited by Field, 2015:1-13) held that there is a measure of free-will restored in every human being. By the Wesleyan-Arminian view, it may be inferred, that, although human beings are depraved, they are not totally vested out of their wills on their salvation. According to this view, while God’s grace is imperative, it is not the only need. The formula leaves human beings, a slither of necessity for us to will for our salvation, such that the principle of moral responsibility

may be justified, and thus the 99% rating. Ultimately, the glory ascribed to God cannot be said to be full and His alone.

God instituted the gospel to show humanity His immense love through His Only Son's death on the cross. This is the grace message, that we were enabled to live a Christian life despite of our very nature – defiled, sinful, and depraved. The realization of who we were before Christ's death on the cross is of utmost essence for the understanding of the gospel message and the knowledge of God's grace. Only when we see that once we were nothing, but God, by His sovereign will, granted salvation to His people, can we, acknowledge how profound, amazing and great the gospel message is and thus we come to faithfully follow it even when some ends still lie loose with our human understanding. We come to realize that God is amazing in His love and grace for us and sovereign in His plan for all.

6.2.2 *The gospel message today*

It may be concluded that the nadir cause of the grace debate is the contrasting understanding of the meaning of the gospel on grace. Packer (1926:1) wrote:

There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, the building up of a local church life, the pastor's dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead. This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel.

Although written more than half a century ago, his statements find relevance in the description of the contemporary Christian churches. Lewis (1996:25), in his Screwtape letters, tells of a story where a senior devil, uncle Screwtape, instructs Wormwood, a junior devil, to use a tried and tested technique to seduce souls into sin. Uncle Screwtape said, "Welcome their horror of the same old thing because the horror of the same old thing is the greatest passion we have put into the human heart – an endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship." The devil's statement depicts Lewis' intention to show the frailty of human beings to resist a simple yet fundamental understanding of what is taught today by reflecting on what was taught before. There is usually a resistance to what has already

been done and said before. People like to see and hear new things because people have the insatiable desire to go with the rhythm of times. The “horror of the same old things” encourages people to love novelty and change; to escape from the boredom and monotony of repetition. Screwtape explains to Wormwood to cause the love for a type of change that is disorderly and restless; that culminates in “the demand for infinite or non-rhythmical change”.¹⁵⁹ The same is observably true with the reception of the gospel today. Grigg (2010) notes that “today’s society seems to be becoming more and more impervious to the gospel.” Percy (2016:1) writes about this as the dilemma of the church:

One of the most pressing challenges faced by theology and the churches is how to engage with contemporary culture. Some theological and ecclesiological traditions feel so threatened by the prospect of being overwhelmed or consumed by the task of engagement that they retreat before they have advanced; standing apart from key issues and debates in culture is seen to be the only way of protecting the integrity and identity of the Christian tradition. Others prefer a different strategy – namely one of deep engagement – but, in so doing, can find themselves so transformed that they become alienated from their roots.

He complains that the gospel has become merely commercialized, euphemized and preached in a manner that may make it more relative and understandable and acceptable by an audience. Webster (2009:12) writes, “Many sincere and thoughtful Christians are advocating practical, market-sensitive, consumer-oriented approach to church growth.” While contemporary churches resort to this strategy with the intention of spreading the gospel, the dangerous tendency of taking the gospel to extents where it is tweaked to satisfy the comforts of an audience, remains to be a daunting concern. Webster (2009:12) further wrote that although their motives might be right, “The issue is not the Christian marketers’ sincerity or integrity, but whether their strategies and tactics are consistent with a spirit-led, Christ-centred approach to numerical growth and spiritual growth.” Due to the urge to bring in more members to the church, desperate measures have been resorted to, where the gospel is tailored to gratify the members of the church. The fad in preaching the gospel is to make it appear that the church can solve all problems. It is further studded with self-help worldviews and inundated with promises of prosperity in Christian living. Although the idea does seem to be appealing, it somehow cheapens and oversimplifies the sanctity and the integrity of the gospel and distorts the true and unequivocal message of the

¹⁵⁹ See also Lewis 2010 <http://tabc.jaycodesign.com>

gospel. Such highhanded machinations of sweet-talking an audience in the hopes of luring them to join the church and somehow get them converted deludes, if not, pollutes the essence of the church and what it stands for.

Tozer (1962; 2016: par. 2) says that the gospel today has preached the greatest heresies, “Churches today are just in the entertainment business ... it is scarcely possible in most places to get a person to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.”¹⁶⁰ This is somehow a reverberation of what Calvinists accuse Arminians of – turning the gospel message of grace upside down. The early church who dissented against the Calvinist was accused of minimizing the work of Christ (Koivisto, 2009:236). Barna (1988:1f.) has exposed their approaches of marketing the gospel; they do this so that the gospel message becomes more appealing, diverting the centre of reference from Christ to human self-gratification. Packer (1926:1) decries today’s gospel message as it focuses on the church members and the help God gives them. The themes of human natural inability to believe God’s free election being the ultimate cause of salvation and of Christ dying for His sheep are less preached, if not totally silenced. MacArthur (2002: par. 2) writes, “The church has been far too willing to embrace the fads of worldly opinion ... Christians often merely echo worldly thinking on the psychology of guilt and the importance of feeling good about oneself. The adverse effect on the life of the church can hardly be underestimated. Nowhere has the damage registered more than in the way professing Christians deal with their own sin ... The church, as a whole, is growing less concerned with sin and more obsessed with self-exoneration and self-esteem.” Likewise, Piper (2015b) preached regarding “the self-centeredness of Arminianism.”¹⁶¹ Piper decries contemporary churches today that employ humanistic influence and appeal¹⁶² into their theology. The gospel today has morphed into a message of self-gratification, “I” centred orientation (cf. Chap. 5:5.3.2.5). A

¹⁶⁰ The great heresy of the church today is that we think we’re in the entertainment business, Tozer believed this to be true back in the 1950s and 1960s; the church members “want to be entertained while they are edified,” he said that in 1962, see Livingstone 2016 <http://theaquilareport.com>

¹⁶¹ See also Olson 2016 <http://www.patheos.com>

¹⁶² Views of humanism include self-efficacy, self-actualization, and self- determination, see UK Essays 2013 <https://www.ukessays.com>

gospel directed away from the true message of Scripture, of Paul and unlikely to bring *Soli Deo Gloria* (cf. chap. 2: conclusion; chap. 5:5.3.2.5; Eph 2:8-9).

6.3 The Protestant church then and now

6.3.1 *The legacy of Calvin: the servant of the word*

Calvin has been credited for many thoughts that would characterize and influence the modern world, in the realms of theology, politics, extending also to socio-economic and cultural arenas (Bouwsma, 1989:1). There is no doubt that Calvin and his followers made a mark in history, especially in the establishment and the conveyance of the Reformed perspectives on the gospel. Bouma (1947:34) wrote, “The Calvinistic faith was the most consistent, the most mature, and the most comprehensive interpretation of the truths of the gospel on the days of the Protestant Reformation.” Calvin’s legacy continues in the lives of every Reformed theologian today. We can still see him at least in the attempts of a number of Christians to continue the legacy that he has left to the Church and more importantly, in the attempt of the Church to astride in following the integrity of theological standards as he, basing on biblical principles, has set.

According to Sproul, (2009a:3-7) Calvin was, in reality, the architect of Reformed theology. Among the sixteenth-century magisterial Reformers, we notice that Luther, being a brilliant student of language, brought to the theological table an uncanny ability to provide vignettes of insight into particular questions of truth. But Luther was not a systematician by nature. Weibe (2007:54) writes, “It is clear that Luther has no place for any natural theology,” and so he could not be the theologian of theologians. He never developed a full-orbed systematic theology for the instruction of the church (Sproul, 2009b). Ogilvie (2017) says, “Luther was a volcano spitting out fiery ideas in all directions without patterns or systems ... ideas cannot live and last without a body ... And the great need of the Protestant movement in the last days of Luther was for a theologian with the ability to arrange and to express the new faith within a system.” That theologian, Ogilvie was referring to Calvin. “It was Calvin who bannered Protestantism by giving

it a body of theology.” Through his many substantial writings, the theology of most Protestant churches had been founded (Klooster, 2015:1). Packer (1966:127) wrote that “Calvin as in effect the producer, not merely of Protestantism in its most virile and thoroughgoing form, but of some of the most fundamental ingredients in post-Renaissance Western civilization. It is doubtful whether any other theologian has ever played so significant a part in world history.”

Sproul (2009b), crediting Calvin’s works for bringing so much impact in his life and to his contemporaries, said, “Calvin brought to the study of theology a passion for biblical truth and a coherent understanding of the word of God. Of all the thinkers of the sixteenth century, Calvin was most noted for his ability to provide a systematic theological understanding of Christian truth.” His “magnum opus,” the Institutes of the Christian religion, remains to be an indispensable reference in the field of systematic theology (Packer, 1966:129). Melancthon¹⁶³, Luther’s assistant, an impressive scholar in his own right, gave Calvin the sobriquet “the theologian.” Sproul (2009b) continues his homage to Calvin, “If one mentions, ‘the philosopher,’ we understand that to mean a reference to Aristotle. On the same manner, if one mentions ‘the theologian,’ the heirs of the Reformation think immediately of Calvin.”

This theological acumen that Calvin has passed on to the Church is comprised of several extraordinary works; among others, his “Institutes of the Christian Religion” (1559) was the greatest theological work to come out of the Reformation (Packer, 1966:129). Schaff (1892:678) writes, “Calvin was the greatest divine and best writer among the Reformers, and his ‘Institutes of the Christian Religion’ have almost the same importance for Reformed theology as the ‘Summa’ of Thomas Aquinas for that of the Roman Church. He organized the ideas of the Reformation into a clear, compact system, with the freshness and depth of genius, and the convincing power of logic.” Although Calvin quoted the Church fathers to show that he stood in the mainstream of biblical thought – that is the Church fathers standing atop the apostles and

¹⁶³ See Christian Classics Ethereal Library 2017a <https://www.ccel.org>

the prophets.¹⁶⁴ Calvin's theology, as Klooster (2015:1) noted, is one which is hinged ultimately to the word of God. Klooster (2015:2) wrote, "Calvin was above all a theologian of the word of God! The Bible was the source and norm of all Calvin's thought. It was the Scripture from which his expository sermons were drawn. It was the Scripture which he carefully exegetes in order to produce his excellent commentaries. And it was the same truth of that word of God, the Holy Scriptures, which Calvin, the theologian, organizes and systematizes." Not only in his Institutes but also in his other works and commentaries and sermons did he teach the doctrine of grace. His works were in fact, according to Greef (2008:75-90), "The largest commentary project ever undertaken by one individual, covering 75% of the Bible including both Testaments intensively expositional, exegetical, insightful, warm, pastoral, and scholarly." Calvin¹⁶⁵ wrote commentaries on several books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation, and all his commentaries are still in print. There were also his discourses through which he delivered approximately 4000 sermons¹⁶⁶ during his entire ministry in Geneva (Taylor, 2001:68; Peter, 1984:23-48). Calvin embraced all the Five *Solas* of the Reformation as evidenced by his teachings and sermons (see chap. 5).

Calvin was unequivocally God-centred in his doctrines. He emphasized the glory and sovereignty of God (Bouma, 1947:1; Hesselink, 1992:31). Calvin (cited by Klooster, 2015:3; also cf. his Inst.) championed the undisputed right of God to be the first cause and the last end of all things. His faithful adherence and utmost reverence to the sovereignty of God is manifested in his obedience to divine revelation and his strong emphasis of the Scripture and his unequivocal conviction that although there are many questions on the salvation narrative, all is due to the unfolding of God's sovereign will.

¹⁶⁴ Analogous to Ratio Christi's post, it says that "like Calvin they stand upon the shoulders of a rich tradition" and also encourages the readers not to forsake Calvin and the Reformers' contributions and sacrifices, see Ratio Christi at North West University Potchefstroom 2017 <https://www.facebook.com>

¹⁶⁵ See Christian Classics Ethereal Library 2017b <https://www.ccel.org>

¹⁶⁶ Calvin delivered 2500 sermons from 1549–1564 and another 1500 sermons were preached from 1537–1549; of these 4000 sermons, roughly 1500 have been preserved, see Peter *Geneve Dans la Predication de Calvin* 23-48.

Regarding Calvin's treatment of the Scripture, Murray (1982:308) said, "Calvin was the exegete of the Reformation and in the first rank of biblical exegetes of all time." In the same esteem, Schaff (1892:524) remarked, "Calvin was an exegetical genius of the first order. His commentaries are unsurpassed for originality, depth, perspicuity, soundness, and permanent value." He further praised the vast literary outputs of Calvin saying, "the literary activity of Calvin is not surpassed by any ecclesiastical writer, ancient or modern, and excites double astonishment when we take into consideration the shortness of his life, the frailty of his health, and the multiplicity of his other labours as a teacher, preacher, church ruler, and correspondent" (Schaff, 1892:267). Sproul (2009b) added, "Calvin in debate could draw on his encyclopedic knowledge of biblical passages, as well as the ability to quote at length from ancient thinkers such as Augustine and Cicero. But above all things, Calvin sought to be true to the word of God. He was the biblical theologian par excellence who was at the same time a singularly gifted systematic theologian."

Calvin's works did not only involve writing, but his life was mostly tethered in preaching (cf. Van't Spijker, 2009:148f.). In his biographical account of Calvin, Cottret (2003:288) wrote, "Preaching was at the centre of the Reformer's activity; in his last years; it utterly exhausted him and wore him down. His frail appearance, his short breath, his voice as if from beyond the tomb, and his back bowed by illness regained a sudden energy and a last grandeur under the impulse of the spirit that animated and subdued them. Calvin was a man who spoke. For Calvin ... preaching was the very essence of the Reformation."

Calvin's toils in mining the message of the gospel got him the accolades, "the theologian," "the exegete," and "the commentator," but among these, there is no better title to ascribe to him than the fitting title "the servant of the Word" (Goroncy, 2014:2; Clary, 2016). His devotion to Scripture, his insistence on the true message of the gospel, and his passion to highlight both the grace and sovereignty of God, anchored in the Bible, were but among his legacies to the church. From his astounding works and throughout his life, it can be gleaned that Calvin was hugely engulfed to the study of Scripture, because for him, it is a revelation of God Himself to

us. Calvin describes the Scripture as “gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly” (Inst. 1.6.1).

Indeed, it can be said therefore that Calvin heeded Paul’s directive, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15 NIV). Inspired by the Scripture; Calvin sowed seeds of faith and theological wisdom, which until now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are still bearing fruits.

6.3.2 The principles and the influence of the Reformers

Protestantism gradually became a label applied to those who adhered to the doctrines of the Reformation (it was also attached to Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and their followers).¹⁶⁷ “The Protestant movement arose out of the resistance to what was considered to be errors in the orthodox teachings,”¹⁶⁸ where an assembly of early protestants clamped down on religious renewal the basic tenet of reformation that “we are determined by God’s grace and aid to abide by God’s word alone, the holy gospel contained in the biblical books of the Old and New Testaments” (cf. Elwell, 2001:963-965). Elwell (2001:963) lists the fundamental principle of 16th century Protestantism:

1. *Soli Deo Gloria*, “Glory to God alone” – the justification of God’s wisdom and power; honouring God’s sovereignty and providential predestination;
2. *Sola Gratia*, “by grace alone” – redemption as God’s free gift accomplished by Christ’s saving death and resurrection;¹⁶⁹
3. *Sola Scriptura*, “Scripture Alone” – Scripture as the sole access to Christian revelation. The freedom of the Scripture to rule as God’s word in the church; and,
4. The Church as the believing people of God – the Church is constituted not by hierarchy, succession, or institution, but by God’s election and calling in Christ through the gospel.

Calvin (1844:119) highlights the fundamental foundation of Reformed Christianity: worship (pp. 17-23, 52-54), salvation (pp. 24-28, 61-62), sacraments (pp. 29-32, 70), and government of the Church for the spiritual well-being of every Christian and the Church (pp. 139-145). He wrote:

¹⁶⁷ See Encyclopaedia Britannica 2017 <https://www.britannica.com>

¹⁶⁸ See Gonzalez *History of Christian Thought* 248; Dixon *Protestants* 33.

¹⁶⁹ In the previous chapters, the Reformed theology on grace doctrine was expounded through the five points of Calvinism.

If it be inquired when by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity ... Firstly, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain. After these come the sacraments and the government of the Church, which, as they were instituted for the preservation of these branches of doctrine, ought not to be employed for any other purpose.

(Calvin, 1844:13-14)

It is clear, that Calvin made a stark distinction when he said that worship and salvation are the soul of the Church and the sacraments and the government are the body of the Church. In this sense, Calvin was highlighting worship and salvation as the most important and that sacraments and the government of the Church follow the former. The order listed by Calvin is such to make apparent the order of importance or priorities in the church. Contemporary churches however, seemed to have deviated from this prescription of Calvin, due in part, to what Lynn (2010) and Carson (2005:99) consider a dilemma of the contemporary church which is biblical illiteracy.

Protestantism indeed radicalized Christianity from an orthodox-tight institution into a Christ-centred community of believers. It was a minority movement in its initial stages but as Noll (2011) writes, "Within only a few more years [since Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Saxon Wittenberg prompting a debate on the Catholic Church's doctrines], this German 'protest' ... had spread to England, Scotland, the Netherlands, France, parts of eastern Europe and even outposts in Spain, Italy, and other centres of continuing Catholic strength. Within less than a century, Protestants had established European beachheads in the New World and today? Nearly 500 years after Luther's initial provocation in Wittenberg, Protestants and Protestant-like movements are all over the map, both literally and figuratively" (see also Gonzalez, 1987:248). The Protestant movement had marked a great impact, not only in the realm of theology, but it has helped shape cultures and had a strong impact on other aspects of life and sectors of society: marriage and family, education, the humanities and sciences, the political and social order, the economy, and the arts (Heussi, 1956:317-319; Elwell, 2011:963-965). Bishop (2014:12) writes of the vast reaches of Protestantism, "The Protestant Reformation would change Christianity from a religion with one omnipotent power, the Catholic Church, to now encompass a myriad of new beliefs using a separate Protestant

context. That context is based on differing scriptural interpretations, not only different than that of the Roman Catholic Church, but in many instances different from one another. This pluralism has continued to this day and can be found in the great number of denominations within Protestantism, and those that stand outside of that framework as well.” Noll (2011) describes Protestantism as a “dynamic change in the world of Christianity.” However, a more detailed study of early church history will show that the church became very triumphant at the expense of numerous challenges.¹⁷⁰ With the advent of Protestant churches in all parts of the world, emerged also the challenges that face the church today. While Protestantism then, influenced the broad sector of society, Protestant churches now, seemed to have lost its grip over society, it has been increasingly losing its power and influence in society so much so that the roles have overturned; it seems that the church has been yielding to the pressures of modern society (cf. Hillman, 2012). Machen (2015:10) observed the declining influence of the church in contemporary society through the increasing indications of the declining power of Christianity in contemporary society. He writes, “These things (referring to lesser church attendance, non-observance of the Lord’s Day) are simply surface indications of a decline in the power of Christianity. Christianity is exerting a far less powerful direct influence in the civilized world today” (Machen, 2015:10). Although, there is indeed a need to bring the gospel to society, the church needs to convey the gospel to contemporary audiences in such a way that the very essence of the gospel is not at all lost in translation. Percy (2016:1) noted that one of the challenges and pressing struggles of the Church today is how to engage with contemporary culture without losing its purpose.

6.3.3 *The Protestant’s gospel message today*

In chapters 3 and 4, we have noted the centrality of grace as a doctrine in soteriology. We saw that the gospel message insisted on its integrity, so that the salvation narrative and God’s love for all may be relayed and understood. We have also studied that numerous interpretations and views on grace have circulated and perplexed the understanding of its workings in the salvation

¹⁷⁰ For a study of Protestant history see Pelikan “The Christian Tradition” 41.

of human beings and in Christian living. Because of these, the Protestant church is in a doctrinal and a spiritual dilemma.¹⁷¹ Engelsma (2004) declared, “These (referring to the 20th century onwards) are dark days for Protestantism.” Percy (2016:1) says that the church seems to feel threatened by the prospect of being “overwhelmed or consumed” by the task of engaging with modern society that Calvin’s fundamental teaching that worship and salvation be pushed to the frontline of churches, have instead been pushed back to the side-lines in the name of engaging with modern-day society to attract more people to the church (cf. McIntosh & Engle, 2004:9). Webster (2009:16-17) vilifies this scheme, he warned, “Church attendance may grow, but true Christian individuality and community will be lost.” Webster fears that the true essence of worship and salvation is being set aside. Contemporary churches, more often than not, busy themselves with counting their church members and ensuring the flow of membership sign-ups so much so to the extent that the church has become a mere entertainer. The main goal has transformed from worship and salvation to an entertainment business where the primary priority is to scoop-up as many members as possible.

Indeed, what Paul wrote to Timothy is an apt warning for today’s churches:

But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, and conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

(2 Tm 3:1-5 NIV)

Engelsma (2004) adds:

The spiritual condition of Protestantism today is wretched. One cannot see in her that she is the daughter of the church of the Reformation. Protestantism now very much resembles the pre-Reformation church. Its misery is compounded by the fact that, like the Laodicean Church of Revelation 3, it supposes that it is “rich, and increased with goods, and [has] need of nothing.” The evil of Protestant churches today is that they preach and believe another gospel than did the Reformation church. The Protestant churches are weighed and found wanting, above all, in respect to their gospel, their doctrine. This is fatal, for a church’s gospel is the essential thing. It is the gospel that makes a church the true church of Jesus Christ.

He also concludes “the best that can be said of Protestantism today is that it is nothing.”

¹⁷¹ Extracted from 1 Tm 1:18 and 6:12 of “fighting the good fight of the faith”; 2 Tm 4:7, as Paul himself have fought this good fight and have finished the race; and from depicting the good soldier in 2 Tm 2:3 and the warrior of Christ by putting on the full armour of God in Eph 6:10-18.

The Reformation then was a result of the hunger for the message of the gospel to be truthfully and purely preached. Calvin¹⁷² wrote to Sadoleto,¹⁷³ “The many examples of cruelty, avarice, intemperance, arrogance, insolence, lust, and all sorts of wickedness, which are openly manifested by men of your order, but none of these things would have driven us to the attempt which we made under a much stronger necessity.” The attempt Calvin was referring to was the Reformation. What necessity drove him and the late reformers to struggle to change the face of Christianity before? Calvin¹⁷⁴ continues, “The necessity was that the light the divine truth had been extinguished, the word of God buried, the virtue of Christ left in profound oblivion.” Indeed, the deplorable situation of the church today, prompts us to call, yet again, for another reformation (Engelsma 2004; Boice, 2001; Barnhart, 2016); where God takes centre stage in church responsibility, salvation and worship, as Calvin prescribed, takes the lead in church priority and God’s grace is glorified rightly and revisited, recalled and re-injected to the churches’ teachings today which, as we’ve noted, are inundated with post-reformation grace doctrines (spearheaded by preachers branded as being part of the Hyper-Grace movement). Once again, the church is thrown to the same issues that the Arminians and Calvinists confronted in their contemporaries. Thus, the church today needs the same fervour as Luther, Calvin and their followers had in defending the Reformed doctrines during their contemporaries.

6.4 Reformation today

Is Reformation theology still relevant today? Williams (2013) argues that the church is in need of a “re-reformation.” He contends:

We, as the church in the 21st century, need to recapture a sense of the grandeur of God – how vast and awesome He is. We need a biblical view of His glory. We need a biblical view of His sovereignty. We need a biblical view of what it means to say He’s both transcendentally holy and imminently relational. We need a biblical vision of His love, His mercy, His justice, His grace. If we start there, awestruck by the infinite God at the centre of our worldview, then many other issues in our church world will sort of, self-fix. As true worship is happening, our marriages will get better, our churches will have fewer scandals, and our joy will be maximized in Jesus Christ.

¹⁷² See Calvin and Sadoleto *Reformation Debate* 68.

¹⁷³ In March, 2539, Jacopo Sadoleto, bishop of Carpentas in Southern France, addressed a letter to the magistrates and citizens of Geneva asking them to return to the Catholic faith; the excerpt was part of Calvin’s reply to Sadoleto’s letters, see Calvin and Sadoleto *Reformation Debate* 1.

¹⁷⁴ See Calvin and Sadoleto *Reformation Debate* 69.

Like Calvin, Williams (2013) urges the churches today to streamline God's sovereignty and to magnify God's glory. He stresses on a perspective hinged solely and ultimately to the word of God. Looking at the condition of the church as we have previously described, we may generalize that the church today is losing sight of God and blinded from the true gospel message. Due to the inundation and integration of many diverse beliefs, coupled with the growing emphasis on the trending concepts of human will, liberty, individuality, secularism, the current church is growing more and more detached from the message of the Reformist fathers. Their voices are being drowned by the seeming necessity to blend-in and conform with the current course, so that the church may recruit more members to the church. Turner (2016) laments the shift in the cultural shift of the church. He observed that the church, which is supposed to be a counter-culture,¹⁷⁵ has currently, instead become the subculture¹⁷⁶ and has hugely become more secularized, pushing God to the fringes and concerning itself more with the conveniences of the modern generation. Williams (2013) continues, "The biggest problem in the church today is that many of us have too small a view of who God is. We have shrunk an infinite Being. We have diminished His glory and put Him into very small and manageable boxes. This ignores, objectively, God altogether to the point that He becomes, to us, just a projection of what we think He is like, what we feel He should be like." A "re-reformation" he argues, is a reminder for the church to realize what Calvin fought for, that we [human beings] are totally deprived and are in desperate need of a saviour, and that because of God's love and grace to us, Jesus offered Himself wholly, to be become for us the atonement for our sins and that it is in Him alone that we are saved, only by His grace and through the workings of the Holy Spirit, we come to know of this knowledge. The glory is all God's; we don't share any of it.

Throughout history we have seen how the God's sovereignty and grace are trivialized in church debates. During Jesus' time, Jesus was preaching the kingdom of God while the Pharisees

¹⁷⁵ It's a way of life and set of attitudes opposed to, or at variance with the prevailing social norm, see *Oxford Living Dictionary*.

¹⁷⁶ It's a cultural group within a larger culture and often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture, see *Oxford Living Dictionary*.

stressed on their power and their religion. Jesus confronts the Pharisees and urges the crowd to revere God, instead of the condescending rabbis (Mt 23).

The pattern was seen during Paul's time, in the debate between legalism and antinomianism.¹⁷⁷ The legalists preached that if they wanted to get saved, they have got to supplement God's grace with circumcision and adherence to all kinds of rituals within the Jewish culture (Rm 2:17-29). Likewise, the antinomianism in Romans 6:15-21¹⁷⁸ distorted the meaning of sanctified by grace. Paul confronted legalism and the antinomianism, revealing that their messages of salvation are different from what the gospel teaches. Paul contended for a radically God-centred view of interpreting Scripture and reality (Rm 8; Gl 2:11-21).

Augustine challenged Pelagius who taught that human beings had the power to independently choose salvation (revisit chap. 3). In the previous chapters, we saw the debate between Augustine and Pelagius regarding the human condition (see Table 3 above). Essentially, Augustine fought to reclaim the glory of God in the salvation narrative.

During Luther's time, in the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church usurped the glory that was supposed to be God's alone when they preached that one could buy atonement of sin by paying indulgences (cf. Burnet, 1857). The practice highlighted human beings' desire to work for salvation themselves. It tells a story of the sinner reaching God through earthly means. Standing in the same shoes of Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and the succeeding Reformers contended for a God-centred biblical view of salvation to merit God's amazing grace.

The church is now confronted with the same issues (as the Reformers before). The situation of the church today as painted above is a church who is busy with the affairs of its members, rather than the affairs of God; the convenience of the members rather than the true message of the gospel. Indeed, we need yet again a reformation of the church. Packer (1926) said, "To

¹⁷⁷ Antinomianism is defined as someone who distorts the meaning of sanctification by grace, see Gore 2016 <https://www.youtube.com>

¹⁷⁸ Especially, v 15 NIV, when they asked: "What then, shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"

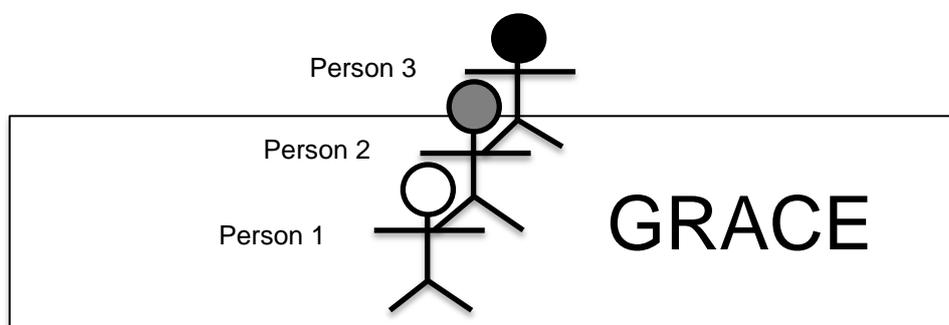
recover the old, authentic, biblical gospel, and to bring our preaching and practice back into line with it, is perhaps our most pressing present need.”

Like Calvin and the rest of the Reformers, the church today needs also to stand on the shoulders of the Church fathers as the Church fathers who stood atop the apostles and the prophets of the Bible; by this we mean, the church ought to learn from the Church fathers and avoid the errors of the past (cf. Brunner, 2014:90-91). The legacy passes on. The contemporary church needs to build its foundational knowledge of the Bible from the experience, teachings, discussions and works of the preceding theologians, church thinkers, and the determinations of doctrinal debates. The voice of God reverberates throughout church history, and it is sure that even today, He speaks to the church to unveil His revelations. Indeed, God speaks to us more strongly today, despite of the waywardness of the church, despite of the human-centeredness of the church and the tendency of the church to glorify its membership more than it is concerned with the preaching of the gospel, its truth and its essence to those who are lost. One thing is sure, that despite the failures of the church, God, by His grace, recalls the church into the very purpose for which He has created it. The church needs only to heed and listen.

The doctrine of grace will always be a topic of debate in Christianity. Future debates are sure to spring up. For from it sprouts the answers to questions on the requisites for the salvation of sinners from damnation. The debate is far from settled. While on one hand it polarizes the church, on the other, it is a manifestation of the enthusiasm of the church in its search for truth and its longing to know the very character of God. As long as the church yearns to take part in the knowledge of God, the embers of grace will be kept aflame and so too discussions and talks of the same.

Figure 5

The church legacy



Note. Person 1 portrays the Church fathers (4 AD), person 2 portrays Calvin and the Reformers (16th century), person 3 portrays contemporary Christianity (21st century), and the backdrop portrays the grace doctrine throughout the church generations.

6.5 Conclusion

The cry of this chapter and of the whole study is a reminder to us (more importantly to contemporary Christians) to be Timothies of our times and to be the truth-bearers for the next church generations to come. As with Timothy, Paul instructs [1 Tm 1:18] and charges [1 Tm 6:12] us to fight the good fight of faith and to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to us against false teachings [2 Tm 1:14, 6:20] as Paul himself fought this good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Tm 4:7 NIV).

This paper aimed to show the shifting of paradigm on soteriology from an anthropocentric (human-centred) perspective to a theocentric (God-centred) one, found in the Reformation period when Luther and Calvin rose to the pulpit to defend the grace and glory of God. However, far from realizing a completely theocentric church, the prescribed paradigm shift is losing its gears and is propelling back towards the same course that the Reformist fathers have fought against. The fear that the church now may once again, revert to an anthropocentric perspective may be realized when we do not reflect on the teachings and experiences of the Church fathers and the debates that had and that are still troubling the church today. We are called to be defenders of the true hope and the true gospel message that we have in grace. The first epistle of Peter 3:15-16 NIV says:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.¹⁷⁹

Paul warns, instructs, and challenges us to stand on the true principles of the Scripture and to learn how to defend the word of God from those that trivialize and distort it.

¹⁷⁹ "This passage has laid the foundation for the engagement of apologetics as a method of dialectic polemics to further Christian beliefs," see Rezkalla 2012 <http://christianapologeticsalliance.com>

We have earlier established the importance of the doctrine of grace as presented by Paul (Eph 1:5-7, 2:8-9) in Christian theology and in Christianity itself. Paul¹⁸⁰ teaches the church to walk in God's grace, and to live it. He challenges the church to stand in spiritual and doctrinal warfare and in faith firmly so that it may not conform to this world and to this world's teachings and inclinations (Rm 12:2). Paul instructs the church on how to respond against the very forces that disparages the Word of God, by putting on the full armour of God (Eph 6:10-18). While Calvin teaches the church to be the servants of the Word, Paul teaches the church to be good soldiers of Christ and of Scripture (2 Tm 2:3) and to be the mighty warriors of Christ, by taking the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, so that it may defend the glory of God and His grace from those who mislead others towards a skewed understanding of God and of the human self (Eph 6:10-18, esp., v. 17; Inst. 1.1). The Scripture, and a deep knowledge of it, is hence, the best tool for apologetics. We saw the life of Calvin, who through his writings and works defended the true message of the gospel. Calvin's works themselves stand to be a rich source of apologetics for the word of God.

The topic of God's grace and the Calvinistic theology encapsulated in the acronym "TULIP" as well as the Reformed theology of the Five *Solas* are subjects of no small discourse. Although these have been central for the churches back then, it has become a more incessant, important and dynamic topic today. The grace debate is not yet silenced but has rather become even raucous especially with the advent of technology and the free-flow of ideas and the liberty of discourse, although the context in the early Reformer's era were much different from society today. The issues raised before find similarity with the principles questioned today. While the manner of answering then may not be as effective as they would be when applied in present society, the basic tenets remain the same. While the church needs to confront the arguments imposed against it by a more secular society against the church's doctrines, it has to engage the questions of society while at the same time remaining rooted in the true message of Scripture. When found wanting of clarification and exposition of the passages in the Scripture

¹⁸⁰ Eph 4-5; walk in unity v 4:1-16, walk in holiness v 4:17-23, walk in love v 5:1-6, walk in light v 5:7-14, and walk in wisdom v 5:15-6:9, see Hoehner *Ephesians* 497-817.

on the fundamental tenets of grace, the works of Augustine and the Reformist fathers such as Luther and Calvin, may always be resorted to.

This chapter of the study showed the current concern of the church as being very dissimilar from that of the early Reformed churches. While the early church confronted those outside its walls in terms of doctrine, the contemporary church's challenge is to confront itself within its walls in terms of prioritizing God first over its other concerns so that it may effectively convey the true message of the gospel outside its walls. While the church today may be preoccupied with the concerns of its members, Paul urges the church thus: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tm 2:15 NIV).

6.6 Logical/Summative Conclusions

6.6.1 Chapter 1: Research Introduction

Reformed Calvinistic apologetics is a methodological defence to any controversial ecclesiastical issue presented by contemporaries. This Reformed apologetics is a tradition that must be passed on to the Christian church so that it knows, no matter the changes of time, how to defend its faith without compromising the gospel message.

6.6.2 Chapter 2: Pauline Grace

The authority to the doctrine of God's grace is the Scripture. Paul's writings are fundamental on the topic of Grace as he has been called the Apostle of Grace to whom the doctrine of Grace was entrusted to be preached. We have exegetically examined Ephesians 1:5-7 and 2:8-9 which encapsulated the grace teaching of the Scripture. The Five Points of Calvinism or the "TULIP" are in favour of exegetical study. We have seen how Paul explained grace through his writings and why Paul was called the Apostle of Grace.

6.6.3 Chapter 3: Calvin on grace: The forgiveness of sin and the salvation of human beings

The primary characters of these unrelenting doctrinal disputes on grace are Calvin and Arminius, although Luther started the Reformation, these two icons systematically presented the critical issues under the umbrella of the grace doctrine. Their *chefs-d'oeuvre* are the systematic theological concepts of God's sovereignty and the grace anatomy – "TULIP" in response to the sophisticated philosophical arguments on human free will as embodied in the Remonstrance.

6.6.4 Chapter 4: the grace debate

While Sproul, Brown, and other notable theologians may be said to be carrying on the baton of Reformation and Calvin's legacy of keeping the integrity of God's sovereignty over the design of the salvation of human beings. Walls, Prince, and other Evangelicals are rising and re-echoing the teachings of Arminius. The debate has remained and continued into contemporary Christianity. The art of debate and apologetics are becoming traditions which have become more dynamic in contemporary Christianity since Arminius and Calvin.

6.6.5 Chapter 5: In defence of Calvin

Grace to Calvin consists primarily of two things: 1) the knowledge of God; and, 2) the knowledge of self, in this order. These are presented systematically in his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Reformed doctrinal defence may be condensed in the acrostic TULIP, although it is only a composite of the totality of the doctrine of the Reformed faith. Calvin's concepts may be construed as Christological-Soteriology. These two are both under the thematic umbrella of God's sovereignty in the salvation narrative. The above-statements are understood as "Monergistic"¹⁸¹ in the ecumenical functions of the Triune God to the redemptive act where the Father predestines, the Son atones, and the Spirit regenerates.

¹⁸¹ "Simply means that it is God who gives ears to hear and eyes to see, it is God alone who gives illumination and understanding of His word that we might believe, it is God who raises us from the dead, who circumcises the heart and unplugs our ears; it is God alone who can give us a new sense

The Calvinistic doctrine of grace which Calvin systematically presented through the TULIP and his other works and writings (the Institutes and the five pillars of the Church), are not only Reformed theologies but also powerful apologetic resources in defending the Reformist tradition of faith.

6.6.6 Chapter 6: the relevance of Calvin and the grace debate in contemporary Christianity

This chapter shows the condition of the contemporary church and calls on a re-reformation where God becomes the centre of the church (theocentric) instead of human whim or self-gratification (anthropocentric). This chapter also shows that the church struggles against itself to thwart conformity with secularization in order to maintain membership count (as if quantity of members is the measure of a victorious church). The struggles of the early Reformist fathers are therefore relevant and significant in Christianity today as they remind and urge us to shift our faith-focus back to God and not on our individuality or our own wills and gratification. The Reformed faith teaches us that the church and the salvation of sinners are not about the human will and ability, but it is all about God and what He has done for us out of His grace and sovereignty.

This chapter urges the church to heed to Paul's call to stand as a good soldier and a mighty warrior of Christ, fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tm 1:18, 6:12; 2 Tm 2:3, 4:7; Eph 6:10-18) as Calvin and the other Reformist fathers did. The grace debate was their warfare, in which we can say, with their tremendous influence on modern concepts, that they were indeed victorious in their time. However, it is now the onus of the modern Christian church to rise to the challenge so that it does not lose its own warfare today.

that we may, at last, have the moral capacity to behold His beauty and unsurpassed excellency," Hendryx 2017 <https://www.monergism.com> (also termed to as "the belief that the Holy Spirit is the only agent who effects regeneration of Christians – this view is held by Reformed and Calvinistic groups seen salvation as the work of God alone, from first to last; and He has chosen in eternity past whom He will save out of lost humanity, and in His timing, He will bring the elect to faith through the work of the Spirit for the sake of the Son, and save them forever to the praise of His glorious grace (Rm 8:29f) – this is opposed to the synergistic view as held by Arminianism and its theological predecessor semi-Pelagianism where salvation is seen as a cooperative effort between God and humans," see Theopedia 2017 <http://www.theopedia.com>)

6.7 Recommendations and further studies

The doctrine of grace should be viewed through the Christological-Soteriological perspective and in the Redemptive-Historical biblical interpretation, which may be achieved through a faithful exegetical methodology. The gospel message is simple; it shows the ultimate grace and sovereignty of God in His design of the salvation of humanity. A wrong methodology in doing theology, reflects and affects the interpretation of the gospel message. The contemporary church needs to stand on the shoulders of the forefathers of the faith. Calvin too suggested a guide towards understanding the gospel message. He encourages us to have knowledge of God (this may be acquired through the faithful study of the Scripture) so that we may have knowledge of ourselves. The contemporary church faces the dilemma of losing sight of God because the contemporary church seemed to have tweaked the formula that Scripture and Calvin prescribed – the church today aims to have knowledge of the human-will (through marketing strategies and persuasive talks) so that we may know God. Due to the church's desire to conform to society, the church today advocates a reverse paradigm - from a theocentric gospel to an anthropocentric gospel message.

Calvin and the Reformist fathers followed Paul, as Paul followed Christ. The church too then has to heed. Paul says, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 1:13 NIV). This study thus encourages us [Christians] to find our way back to the sound teachings of the Scripture (knowledge of God) so that we may know who we really are and our true condition (knowledge of self) – totally depraved sinners who are in desperate need of God (Eph 2:1). The knowledge of who we are before God allows us, in turn, to look up to Him and see what He has done for us – only then can we exclaim that indeed God is amazing in His grace and love; that all glory belongs to God alone.

There are still loose ends that this paper is not able to mend but if permitted, the author would love to study on the following questions: if God is indeed sovereign, does our doubting move Him? And what of faith? Likewise, further studies on the core doctrinal stand of Wesleyan-Arminianism or the Nazarene Church on the "entire sanctification" is also of great interest. The

author questions the concepts of spiritual formation as a prerequisite to grasping the full understanding of the doctrine of sanctification by grace. Ultimately, this paper will aid the answers to the overwhelming questions on the doctrine of God's grace.

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ANNEXURES

Reformed Calvinistic apologetics: methodological and doctrinal defences to controversial ecclesiastical debates

On God's sovereignty

5 points of Calvinism:

(T) – Pelagian-anthropology

(U) – Conditional election

(L) – Universalism

(I) – Human free will

& Monothelism heresy

(P) – Easy Believism

= Knowledge of God and self

5 Solas of the Reformed Church:

(SS) – Marcion heresy

& Law-grace dichotomy

(SGr) – Anthropocentric conversion

(SF) – Evangelical order of salvation

(SC) – Synergism

(SGI) – Church entertainment

= Christological-Soteriology

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