

This sermon was referenced in Chapter 5 (titled, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace") of *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*. Chapter by Steve W. Lemke – footnote #17

The "C" Word (Calvinism)

Dr. Roy Fish, Cottage Hill Baptist Church

August 11, 1997

Well, I know what it feels like to feel like one big goose-bump! (Laughter) If you come to Cottage Hill, to services here, just for what you can get out of it - now there are a lot of other reasons why we ought to meet together like this— but if you come merely for what you can get out of it, friend, I am sorry for you if you leave disappointed. I don't see how you make it out that way. And Choir, thank you. Orchestra, instrumentalists, Ed, all of you who have so enriched us and blessed us tonight, we love you.

(Announcement about Dr. H. Norman Wright's conference)

I'm really a little bit intimidated tonight. Anytime I deal with controversy — that's not my strong suit. Uh... I'm not a polemicist. But when I deal with it, I always felt like a "lion in a den of Daniels!" (Laughter) Now I'm not suggesting that you are not an affirming congregation. You are. I don't know when I have ever been more wonderfully affirmed than I have by folks here in Cottage Hill. But I hope you know what you are getting into tonight, having come to hear about the "C-word." I hope you know. I didn't when I began my study. I didn't realize that it was going to require so much time and so much effort. And, there are 2 things that sort of threaten me tonight. The first one is that this is the first time that I have ever done this. I don't think I have ever said this to you, but for us seminary professors, we get quite a few invitations to preach here and there — any sermon that we have preached any fewer than 10 times is still a new sermon! (Laughter) But for me, that first run, and I have done this before on Sunday morning here, so this is not the first time. But that first run is always, always terribly difficult.

And the second thing is that basically, I am going to be in the role of teacher tonight, and not so much in the role of preacher. I'm not sure that there is a great deal of difference. They tell me in my classes that I preach my lectures. But this is more what I call didactic. It's more of a teaching kind of ministry that I am sharing with you tonight as I talk to you about "What in the World is Calvinism?"

As I approach these 3 nights, I have to confess that I do not feel overly credentialed for doing it. My only credentials, I guess, other than being saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and filled with His Holy Spirit, my only credentials are that I have been a fairly avid reader of the New Testament now for some 45 years. And if I have any other credentials, I suppose it would be this one, relative

especially tonight, that I have an earned doctorate in Church History. Otherwise, I am probably under-credentialed for what I have been called on to do this Monday night.

Periodically, there surfaces in our Convention — the Southern Baptist Convention — periodically there surfaces an interest in what is called "Calvinism." The present surge of interest seems to be especially strong here in Mobile right now. But it is true to a degree across our entire denomination. As far as I know for the first time in the history of our Convention in this century we have 2 very committed Calvinists who are

presidents of 2 of our seminaries. And so this now and then becomes an issue of controversy. It surfaces. Sometimes it serves as a corrective to certain truths that we have been neglecting. But it ought always to be critically examined.

Now, when I talk about Calvinism, I want you to understand that there are many shades of Calvinism. There are degrees to which people accept the basic tenets of this system, as! call it, of Calvinism. There are the "old school" Calvinists, the "hyper-Calvinists", the "classic" Calvinists, the "moderate" Calvinists. And the modern thrust, as I understand it, is encouraging us to embrace all 5 of the major points of classical Calvinism. Five major points that were adopted in the Senate of Dort in the Netherlands in 1618-1619. (I told you I was a church history major.) The Senate of Dort doesn't make a whole lot of difference, but it pretty well determined those major points that would characterize the theology of Calvinism throughout the centuries.

I really feel a need in your praying for me right now. So, before I begin, I'm going to ask you to please pray for me as I lead us prayer that the Spirit of God will be our Teacher tonight. Great God, we thank You for the privilege of worshipping You in a song, of meeting You in the song service, of rejoicing in great truths about You. And we pray You, O Spirit of God, be our Teacher tonight. And I pray that You will not only anoint the one who speaks, but I pray that the ears of people will hear what they ought to hear. And You be glorified in these minutes, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Asahael Nettleton was a great evangelist in the first 25 years of the 19th century. In fact you might call him the "Billy Graham" of that period of time. You probably have never heard of him, but he is one of the great evangelists that this country has produced. He preached, basically in local churches. And thousands of people were converted under the ministry of this great evangelist, Asahael Nettleton. But Nettleton had this to say about his own salvation, being a very committed Calvinist, as almost all Christians in New England were at that time. And that's basically where he ministered. Nettleton had this to say about his own salvation: "The most that I have ever ventured to say respecting myself is that I think it possible that I may get to heaven."

It's not that he was afraid of losing salvation. He knew that he couldn't do that. He believed in the perseverance of the saints. He knew his salvation could never be lost. His fear was, this great

evangelist's fear was that he *might* never have *had salvation in the first place*. "The most that I have ever ventured to say respecting myself is that I think it possible that I may get to heaven." I ask you to compare this with the statement of the apostle Paul: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him against that day."

Now, Nettleton was a very prominent man. He was a Calvinist. But he was an honest man. He was willing to admit that when tuned to its finest point, Calvinism eliminates the possibility of assurance of salvation. Surely there is more joy and assurance in the New Testament than this! Where is the buoyant faith of the early reformers? The assurance? The absolute confidence seen by saints in the New Testament? For a great evangelist, and a man looked on and revered as a great Christian to say, "The most that I have ever ventured to say respecting myself is that I think it possible that I may get to heaven."...

Michael Eaton, in doing a study of some of the old Puritans, particularly those in England, said he studied their deathbed experiences hoping that he would find tremendous inspiration and victory and great assurance. But he said, "I was terribly disappointed." For many of those Puritans who were extremely Calvinistic did not die with that kind of assurance and that kind of victory. Calvinism as a theological system has, in my opinion, a number of holes in it. And that is why to embrace it fully can be dangerous either to an individual or to a church.

Before going into what Calvinism is and where it came from, I want to examine some of these practical dangers as I see them. And history substantiates every one of them. Here is the first one: There is the danger of what Calvinism can do to evangelism and missions. Now, I want to surprise you by saying that this is not always the case. A moderate kind of Calvinism has been the most vital and virile kind of evangelism this country has ever known. And yet Calvinism has undercut missionary and evangelistic efforts. Historically, back in England about 1790, God had laid it on the heart of a young shoe cobbler to try to fulfill the Great Commission. He said, "I believe the church ought to be taking the gospel to the heathen." His name, of course, was William Carey. And William Carey proposed this at an Associational meeting. "I think we ought to take the gospel to the heath." He wanted to go to India. And a very prominent Baptist name John Rylans, Sr. said to him, "Young man, you are just a youthful enthusiast. Sit down! If God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without you or me!" John Rylans was a Calvinist. And this was mainline traditional Calvinism as it existed in Presbyterian Congregational, Reformed and mitigated somewhat in Baptist churches in late 18th century Europe. The whole modern missionary movement could have been snuffed out had Carey listened to John Rylans. But Carey refused to sit down, for he realized that God would not convert the heathen without you and me. That they have to hear the gospel! That somebody has to take the message to them!

Calvinism has led many churches and even entire denominations away from a belief in instantaneous conversion. As I read my New Testament I cannot help but believe that conversion

is an instantaneous experience. It is possible that you do not remember precisely when it happened, but whether you do or whether you don't, conversion is instantaneous. And Calvinism had led churches to the point where they believed that you had to go through a series of stages, maybe 3 or 4, and these stages could take months. And then after 9 months or 12 months, only then were you a real candidate for conversion. And then a Methodist named John Wesley came along. And he rejected much of Calvinism. And Wesley believed in instantaneous conversion. And drunkards would come into his meetings and they would find the Lord and meet Jesus and leave with their lives dramatically transformed —radically changed. The Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, couldn't believe it! How can this be happening? A man experiencing conversion! It began to shake up some Calvinist groups in this country.

Jonathan Edwards, who preached the most famous sermon ever preached in the United States, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Jonathan Edwards was a traditional Calvinist. But in his little town of 1,200 — North Hampton, Massachusetts —he began to see people converted so fast, 300 within a space of a few months, that he had to change his mind about his preparationism for conversion. But Calvinists in the past have led churches away from a belief in instantaneous conversion. I have read what I called the "morphology" or the form of some of this "progressive conversionism." And I think that God must have been saying to those folks in those days, "Hurry up!!" (Laughter) "Let's get on with this thing! I've got a world out there that's lost that needs to be saved!" (Amen) But that is a part of historic Calvinism.

Third, a kind of Calvinism has virtually brought to a standstill evangelism in certain Baptist groups. They believed that if God were going to save people, that He would not do it through human instruments. Like Rylans said, "If He wants to convert somebody, He'll do it without your or me." And they believed this. So they ceased to try to win people to Jesus.

They were a large Baptist group in the 19th century. Today they are only a handful. We call them the "Primitive Baptists" or the "hardshell Baptists," who have just about gone out of existence because they rejected evangelism and the winning of people to Jesus Christ through sharing the message with them. And I predict that it won't be long before this denomination has erected a tombstone, a victim of extreme Calvinism.

I'm talking about what Calvinism does to evangelism. I listened to a tape yesterday of a contemporary preacher who addressed the issue of evangelisms. He is a 5-point Calvinist. He has spoken at many of our Baptist meetings. And referring to people as either spiritually dead or spiritually alive, he made this statement. I went back and listened again just to be sure I got it right. He said, "It is impossible to evangelize the spiritually dead." I couldn't believe my ears! "It is impossible to evangelize the spiritually dead." If we don't evangelize the spiritually dead, that leaves us with one option, and that is to evangelize those who are spiritually alive! And if I

understand what it means to be spiritually alive, those who are spiritually alive don't need evangelism! (Laughter and applause)

I'm telling you that there are potential pitfalls as far as evangelism and missions are concerned in the embracing of Calvinism.

Secondly, I'm talking about some dangers, there is that to which I alluded a minute ago. Calvinism is extremely weak when it comes to giving assurance to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very difficult to know for sure — if you are committed Calvinist — it is very difficult to know for sure whether or not you have eternal life. Assurance in Calvinism is based on the quality of the life of the believer. It is a matter of obedience to the commands of God. But one has to ask, "Am I as obedient as I ought to be? Is my life as qualitative as it ought to be as far as my being a Christian is concerned?"

Ian Murray who has spoken on our campus, and whom I have met, and with whom I have had some joyful fellowship, Ian Murray has said, "There is much reason to fear that the Christian church has to a large extent neglected the duty of self-examination." He tells us that we are to ask such questions as "Am I an heir of God? Do I bear the marks of a child of God? Do I have the title deeds to the resurrection of life and to the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens?" He is encouraging us to do some serious introspection. Now, I might say that it wouldn't hurt most of us to do a little bit of that. A little bit of introspection, not so much as to whether or not we are going to be in celestial mansions, as Murray says, but just to see if my life is pleasing to Jesus Christ and if I am measuring up to Him.

But the Westminster Confession, as you know, the "Magna Carta" of the Reformed faith, and when I speak of the Reformed faith, it is a synonym of Calvinism. But the Westminster Confession says this: "Infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before that believer is a partaker of assurance of salvation." It's no wonder that Nettleton said, "The most that I have ever ventured to say respecting myself is that I think it possible that I may get to heaven."

Now, along with that, Calvinism can lead to a kind of morbid introspection. I said a minute ago, what I'm saying to you is what has been historically documented. It leads one to start looking within rather than without to the Cross and the finished work of the Lord Jesus as the hope of our salvation. For instance, the Reformed doctrine of Calvinism could get us into this kind of labyrinth. It could lead us to this kind of real severe introspection. See if you can follow me: If Christ didn't die for all (and that is a part of the Calvinistic system, that He didn't die for all), if Christ didn't die for all, and if it is possible to have a sorrow for sin that is not true repentance (and Calvinism teaches that), and a faith which is not a true faith, and possessing of the Spirit which falls short of true regeneration, if despite any and every experience of the gospel there is a way

to hell almost from the gates of heaven, if Paul himself, as they say, feared he would lose his own salvation, then what remains of assurance for a Calvinist? It is no wonder that one of the great Calvinists in our country could say, and I repeat it again, "The most that I have ever ventured to say respecting myself is that I think it possible that I may get to heaven."

Well, where did this Calvinism come from? Calvinists of course would like to answer that by saying "It comes from the Bible." And historically, Calvinism has been very strong in its belief in the inspiration of the scripture. But historically, Calvinism came out of the evangelical Reformation of the 16th century that occurred in much of continental Europe and also in England. Calvinism at its inception was a strong statement of salvation by faith alone to the exclusion of human merit, and of Christ as the only object of saving faith. Its initial creed was the Bible. And traditional Calvinism, as I said, has always had a very high *view* of scripture. John Calvin, a French reformer who labored primarily in Switzerland was the greatest theologian of the entire Reformation. Perhaps along with Philip Malangthan. His great theological work, "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" in all likelihood have never been surpassed as theological treatises that sum up virtually the entire scope of Christian doctrine. Calvin was a very autocratic man. He formed church courts in Geneva which had some people executed as heretics. And Calvin himself encouraged the burning of Michael Servitis because Servitis did not agree with him in his doctrine of the Trinity.

Calvinism, of course, derived its name from John Calvin. Some of the basic tenets held by Calvin were later changed by those who became his followers. I say some of them "out-Calvined Calvin."

American Christianity, and I want you to understand this, American Christianity in its earliest decades was almost entirely Calvinistic. The Pilgrims were Calvinist. The Congregationalists of New England were Calvinists. The Reform groups, the Presbyterian groups in the middle colonies in this country, they were all Calvinists. I want you to understand that. Remember, I said there are difference schools, different degrees to which people held the tenets of Calvinism.

I mentioned to you a minute ago the Senate of Dort. It was there that 5 basic points of Calvinism were set forth. This is why some of you have picked up on the acronym **TULIP**. For these letters, T, U, L, I, P, suggest the basic tenets of 5-point Calvinism. The **T** is Total Depravity of People. The **U** is Unconditional Election. The **L** is Limited Atonement. The **I** is Irresistible Grace, and the **P** is Perseverance of the Saints.

T -- Total Depravity of people

U -- Unconditional Election

L -- Limited Atonement

I -- Irresistible Grace

P -- Perseverance of the Saints

I want to deal with these as quickly as possible.

The first one, **Total Depravity of People**. Now, what does this heavy word "total depravity" say to us? About what does it speak? Well total depravity speaks to us about the extent of our sinfulness as human beings. People are totally depraved.

Now, I want to tell you what this does NOT mean for a minute. It does *not* mean that all people are as bad as they could be. It *doesn't* mean that depraved people cannot do some good things. It doesn't mean that depraved people don't have a conscience, that they cannot feel remorse. But what total depravity *does* mean is that people are depraved in all parts of their being. Sin has invaded our minds, our bodies, our affections, our wills. In all parts of an individual, he or she is depraved. It *does* mean that people are so bad that they cannot keep from sinning. And it also means that people are so bad that they cannot save themselves. And that nobody can be saved apart for the saving grace of God. But I have a question at this point. And it is this: *Is mankind so depraved that he cannot respond to God in repentance and faith?* The answer of the Calvinists at this point is "Yes. Man is so depraved that he cannot respond to God in repentance and faith in that depraved condition. We are dead in trespasses and sins, "the Calvinists would say, "and dead people cannot respond."

I come at this point to a major tenet of almost all people who are of a Reformed or Calvinistic position. By the way, in response to that I want to remind you that when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they spiritually died. But when God spoke to them in the Garden, they heard him. People who were dead in trespasses and sins, Adam and Eve, heard the voice of God. They not only heard the voice of God, they were convicted about what they had done, and they obeyed God. they put on themselves skins of animals. So, to say that a person who is dead in trespasses and sins simply cannot hear God speaking does not have biblical basis. That people cannot respond to God in saving faith until and unless they are born again is the position of the Calvinist.

Now, to most of you, that is very surprising. You were born again. You might not even know when it happens. But only if you are born again, can you come to repentance and saving faith. The new birth does not come through saving faith, saving faith comes because one has already received the new birth!

Yesterday, again, I listened to a tape on this very subject. The speaker said, and I quote, "Repentance and faith are gifts from God given only to those who are quickened by regeneration." Now this truth was stated in a number of ways in the message. But essentially, what it said was that the people who are capable of repentance and faith are those who have been born again. I kept listening for explicit statements from Scripture to support this thesis. I heard none.

For over 45 years, I have been studying the New Testament with some degree of diligence. Oh, well over 100 times I have read through the entire New Testament, and I should have read through

it much, much more. On top of that, I have studied particular books and done some intensive word studies in the New Testament. In all of my reading, I have never once read anything that says that regeneration precedes repentance and faith. Instead, I have read verses like Acts 15. This is a pivotal, crucial verse. Acts 15(8-9) —where Peter is talking about his experience of sharing the gospel with the household of Cornelius. "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." "...purifying their hearts..." Friend, that's a clear statement of regeneration! People came with dirty hearts, and they had their hearts purified! And how did they have their hearts purified? "...purifying their hearts by faith."

In that classic passage where Jesus talks about the new birth to Nicodemus, He twice told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. But what those of Calvinistic breed fail to go on to say to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, You know the Old Testament. Like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," (John 3:14) "Like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness..." and the mind of Nicodemus went back to the time that the Children of Israel sinned grievously against God and God sent fiery snakes among them. (Account found in Numbers 21:1-91 and those snakes said, "Put a brass serpent on a pole, and everybody who looks at the serpent will be healed." That is what Jesus is referring to. So He said to Nicodemus, "Like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must I, the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever trusts in Me should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Every time the scripture speaks about life, whether it's John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," or whether it's John 5:24, "Verily, verily! say unto you, he that hears My word and believes on Him that sent ME has everlasting life," when you hear or read those terms "everlasting life," friend, I want to tell you that life comes out of this new birth. It is a reference to the life that God gives to us, and the New Testament is transparently clear that one believes or trusts into eternal life! It's not something that you already have! You believe into it! You don't have it until you trust!

No one with any grasp of scripture would fail to say that this experience of believing is prompted by the Holy Spirit. I want you to know that. That the Spirit of God is the one who leads us to repentance and faith. I didn't realize that when it happened to me. You probably didn't either. I didn't know it was the Holy Spirit making me miserable in my sins! I didn't know it was the Holy Spirit who showed me the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. So don't hear me saying that one comes to a grasp of saving faith apart from the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit — and this is the point — the Holy Spirit *does not have to make us alive before we have this saving faith*. Rather as passage after passage says, saving faith in Jesus and His redeeming work makes us alive in Him. Total depravity, as earlier explained, I believe in. but total depravity that leads to the fact that

regeneration precedes repentance and faith is nothing but sheer implication, faulty logic, and glaringly lacking in biblical basis.

All right. The **U** of the **TULIP** is **Unconditional Election**. Now the word "unconditional" is extremely important here. It suggests that God chooses people to enjoy heaven or suffer hell without any foresight on His part of their faith or their repentance. It is unconditional election. Now, don't you ever forget this — this is not extreme Calvinism: God always initiates repentance and saving faith. And it may surprise you when I tell you that I believe in election. Or the word which is considerably heavier, but always associated with Calvinism, I believe in predestination. But, Scripture plainly teaches that predestination, which means to destine beforehand, is based on foreknowledge. God chose those whom He knew beforehand would choose Him! That's why Paul said, in Romans 8:29-30 in that tremendous passage, "For whom He foreknew..." You'd better start where Paul starts. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestine to be conformed to the image of His Son..." But He predestines on the basis of foreknowledge! The same thing is said in I Peter 1:2, when Peter is telling us about

[Break in Tape]

(Reading I Peter 1:21 "elect according to the foreknowledge of God..." God elects, God predestines on the basis of knowing beforehand. That's what the word "foreknowledge" means. I've checked it out in the Greek. It just means God knows what's going to happen. On the basis that God knows, according to this, He elects. According to Romans 8, He predestines.

One of our great professors at Southwestern [Theological Seminary], made this statement. It might shed some light on what might be a cloudy situation in some of you. He says, "If election means that God's activity in the time is grounded in God's activity in time is grounded in God's purposes in eternity, then it means that in planning our salvation, He took into account all the factors that entered into the actual situation." Now keep listening. "Election does not mean that God arbitrarily chose this man and that one and He passed over this one and that one. It means rather, that foreseeing the man and his total environment and situation, God, out of His own Goodness planned to save him. He planned all the good influences and all the means that helped to accomplish the end."

I had the privilege, last Saturday flying from DF W to Atlanta, I had the privilege of sitting by a schoolteacher who is going to Germany to be a teacher at one of our English-speaking schools in a military area of German. And she had a church background. But she had a deep deeply disturbance in her soul. In fact, she was so deeply disturbed that she went to a chaplain there and told him how deeply disturbed she was, but she didn't get any satisfaction or any peace. Well, needless to say, that kind of situation to a professor of evangelism means "Sick 'em." (Laughter) Excuse me for my failure in decorum and dignity there. But I knew that God was dealing with this

lady. Her heart was hungry and open. See, God knew the situation. She said, "I'm not even supposed to be in this seat! It's sheer accident that I'm in this seat. I'm supposed to be in another seat." But God knew the hunger of her heart. And God knew that she was ready for the message of Jesus. And He took all of the factors regarding her background, her hunger, and He chose to use a vessel that was committed to Him to share the gospel. And sometimes I'm not that vessel that I want to be. And that is God's way of demonstrating His election.

All right. So much for unconditional election. Let's see if I have anything else I want to say about that. I believe that's all. God elects and God foreordains and God predestines, but on the basis of foreknowledge.

The **L** in the **TULIP** stands for **Limited Atonement**, or Limited Love, or Particular Redemption. Now, Calvinism is a system. It almost stands or falls on the connection of all five of its points. And correlated with the doctrine of election so as to produce the logically extended doctrine, this doctrine comes: (It is) that Jesus did not die for all people. He died only for the elect. Why should He waste His time, His effort, and His blood on those who were the non-elect? So, atonement is limited. Atonement is the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. He died only for the elect. Now, I want to tell you that no "letter" in the TULIP causes the fur to rise up on my back like this one! (Laughter) It really says that God did not love all men enough to have Christ die for all. It says that God didn't care about the non-elect. He loved only those who would respond to Him in repentance.

I was discussing with an adamant Calvinist one day this very subject. He is a man of God but he doesn't give 2 cents for the non-elect. He's not interested in them. He couldn't care less. I said, "You mean God doesn't love them?" He said, "No, God doesn't love them. He doesn't love the non-elect." I said to him, "Do you believe that the rich young ruler was one of the non-elect?" He said, "Yeah. He flatly turned down the Lord Jesus Christ. He turned Him down. He was one of the non-elect." So, I just turned in my Bible to Mark 10, and I showed him. I said, "I want you to read this and stuff it in your Hyper-Calvinistic pipe!" (Lots of laughter!) The Bible says that when Jesus looked on the rich young ruler who was just about ready to reject Him, when Jesus looked on him, He *loved* him! (congregation "amens") And that word "love" is the same word that's used in John 3:16. It's the famous Greek word, "ape"! Jesus looked on this lost person and He *loved* him! And you will never pass a person on the streets of Mobile that God doesn't love. You will never rub shoulders with anybody in a crowded shopping center that God does not love.

Limited atonement almost brings me to the point of righteous indignation. Why? Well first of all because limited atonement depersonalizes the offer of the gospel. You see, you cannot look a person in the face, if you want to witness to them about Jesus, you cannot look at them in the face and say to the, "Jesus Christ died for you." You can't do that. Because you don't know that He *did*! You don't know if they are one of the elect or not! Many Calvinists say, "We can offer the

gospel to all," but I want to say that that is impossible under Calvinism. How can you offer a salvation that is not provided? And if Jesus didn't die for somebody, the salvation is not provided, and you cannot offer salvation to all. It depersonalizes the free offer of the gospel. It also does what I talked about a minute ago. It becomes a threat to assurance of salvation. It correlates the death of the Lord Jesus in such a way that it's not possible to look to the Cross and get assurance. Friend, I want to tell you, when I began to wonder how is God going to receive someone who has made as many mistakes as I, who has sinned as much as I have, friend, I look to the Cross. I look to the Cross. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the Cross I cling." He died for me, God. that's the only way I expect to be received. That's the only way I expect to get into heaven. But if atonement is limited, how can I be sure that He died for me? In final analysis, I can't! And that's a part of the reason why I detest the tenet of limited atonement.

Now scholastic Calvinism says it is the duty of all people everywhere to believe. But listen, in the light of limited atonement, I ask you...believe *what?* (Laughter) they can't believe that Jesus died for them because they don't know that for sure! All people are commanded to believe, but it becomes a very nebulous proposition at that point. Believe what?

Now, I not only reject this tenet of limited atonement for those reasons, but the scripture teaches just the opposite. Just think of all those passages where it talks about God loving the world. Just look at John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that HE gave His only begotten Son...." "God so loved the world...."

I Timothy 2:1-4. This is a clincher. Paul says, "Pray for all men..." That's what he is saying. "Pray for all men." And he goes on to tell us why we ought to pray for all men. Verses 3 — 4 say, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved..." How many? (With congregation:) "All men to be saved!" (Applause) God desires *all* people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth!

Peter says the same thing [in II Peter 3:9]. It's God's will that none perish, but that all come to repentance. Then John in I John 2:2 clenches it when he says Jesus Himself "is the atoning sacrifice, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

Well, give me about 5 minutes, and I'll wrap this up. I told you that it's a first-run. (Laughter) The I in the **TULIP** is what is called Irresistible Grace. That means that people who are going to be saved have no other option. They really don't have a choice. The grace of God cannot be resisted. They cannot resist this special saving grace. Now the corollary to this follows: That is that those who are not elected are irresistibly damned— they cannot be saved. Like those who receive grace cannot resist it, so those who receive damnation cannot resist it.

Now, this is one reason why some groups have virtually given up on evangelism. Because it follows that if God works so irresistibly to either save or damn, Christians cannot affect the salvation of

sinner, so they feel no responsibility for sharing that which might even have a tendency to interfere with the immutable purposes of God.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, all of us here, I trust, believe in the sovereignty of God — the absolute sovereignty of God. It is taught in the Bible. But along with the sovereignty of God, taught in the Bible also is the free will of people. You and I can choose. You say, "How can that be reconciled? That God is sovereign and yet people can make choices— people have a will regarding what they are going to do? If God is sovereign, how do you reconcile it? I don't have to. Friend, there are times when you start looking at God that you scrutinize the inscrutable. And God doesn't have one bit of trouble reconciling His sovereignty with man's free will. When you get to heaven, He'll explain it to you in a second, if you still want an explanation. (Laughter) reconcile them? I like the way Spurgeon, who was a moderate Calvinist said it — he was my kind of Calvinist. Spurgeon, when somebody said, "How do you reconcile the sovereignty of God and the free will of man?" he said, "I never have to reconcile friends." And these are friends.

It was Spurgeon who was trying to lead a person to Christ, and somebody got frightened — they were always having to caution Spurgeon somebody got frightened. Maybe the Baptist pastors who cautioned him especially. "You may be speaking to one of the non-elect!" Spurgeon said, "Well....it's all right. I don't think God would mind too much if a few of the non-elect got saved." (Lots of laughter and applause) My kind of Calvinist. (Laughter)

Spurgeon preached from his pulpit "whosoever will may come." Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist wisely said, "The elect are the 'whosoever will's.' The non-elect are the 'whosoever wont's.'"

God's grace can be resisted. People do not have to say "yes to the call of God, and nobody is compelled to say "no" to the call of God.

Finally, and this just takes a minute, the P of the **TULIP**. It is **Perseverance of the Saints**. All of us believe that. Actually, I'd like to add another word, though — another P. Perseverance and Preservation. Because God preserves or keeps, and puts within us His Spirit that we might persevere.

I don't know my congregation very well tonight, but I would just encourage you not to be a follower of Wesley, not to be a follower of Luther, not to be a follower of Calvin, but to get your New Testament out and see what *God* has to say. The problem is I know there are some minds that are already tainted. They were tainted with the system before they got into their New Testaments. It's going to be harder for you. But I remember being on program with Dr. Carl Armadean — Reformed in this theology, president of Wheaton College. Dr. Armadean stood behind a pulpit and said, "It was a painful thing for me to have to come to the place where I

realized that the Author and Finisher and Founder of my faith was not John Calvin but Jesus Christ."

I believe getting involved in Reform theology is a backward step that you as an individual or that you as a church do not want to take.