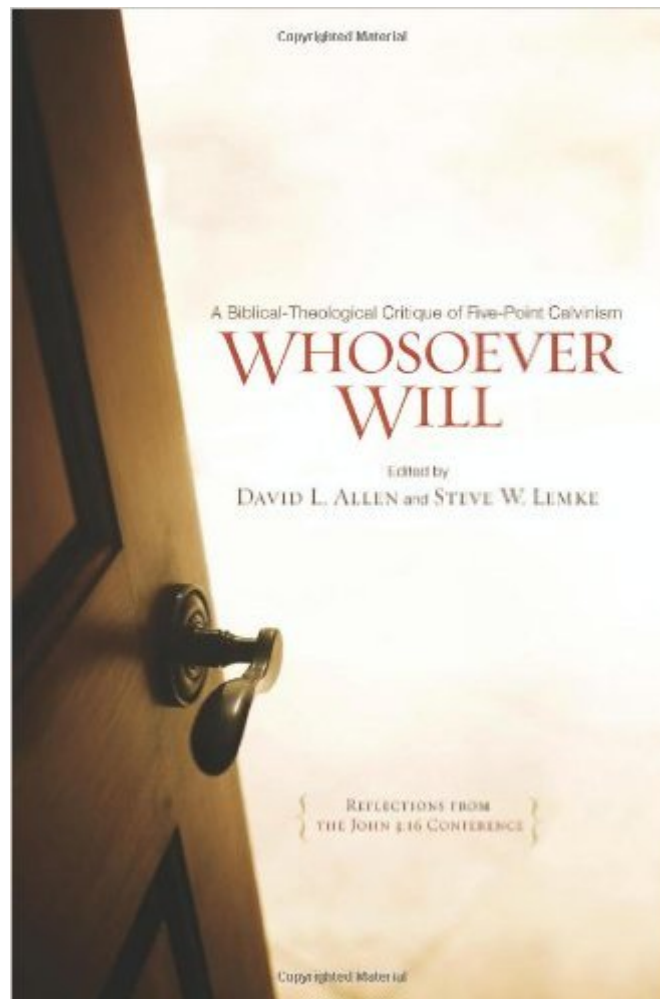


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# Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique Of Five-Point Calvinism



## Synopsis

Arising from the John 3:16 Conference held in late 2008 at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia, *Whosoever Will* presents a biblical-theological assessment of and response to five-point Calvinism. Baptist leaders offering an alternative to the doctrine's TULIP tenets include Paige Patterson (Total Depravity), Richard Land (Unconditional Election), David Allen (Limited Atonement), Steve Lemke (Irresistible Grace), and Kenneth Keathley (Perseverance of the Saints).

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## Customer Reviews

Over the past few years we have seen some solid Arminian books appearing on the scene. I am thankful for this as the rise of Calvinism can largely be placed on the number of books being published by Calvinists such as Dr. John Piper or Dr. John MacArthur. The book *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* is a needed book and one that I do recommend to my fellow Arminians. The book opens with some brief introductions concerning the historical background for the debate within the Southern Baptist Convention and Calvinism. It then contains a sermon by Jerry Vines on John 3:16. The sermon is okay but does a good job of opening the door for the debate. Now let us examine each chapter from an Arminian perspective. Chapter 2 Total Depravity by Paige Patterson This is a good chapter and presentation on total depravity. Patterson does a good job of presenting an Arminian view of the doctrine (though he doesn't call it that). He shows that total depravity is biblical but it is not the doctrine as taught by Calvinists. He shows that while mankind was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), we are depraved (Ephesians

2:1-3) in the sense that there is nothing we can now do to merit eternal life apart from grace given to us in Christ Jesus. An Arminian could read this chapter and agree with nearly all of this.

Chapter 3 Congruent Election by Richard Land This was perhaps the chapter that I struggled with the most. Land seems to be teaching molianism though he never calls it that. Nonetheless, Land advocates a "middle knowledge" viewpoint that God knows all things and that since He knows all things then it follows that He does foreknow those who are His own. Land calls it "congruent election" but I call it "middle knowledge election." To me, this chapter offered little to critiquing Calvinism nor did it help make sense of an alternative viewpoint.

Chapter 4 The Atonement: Limited or Universal? by David Allen I enjoyed chapter 4 since I do hold to an unlimited atonement. Allen presents good arguments both from logic and from Scripture for the basis for believing that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all of humanity (2 Corinthians 5:19 NKJV). Allen clearly shows that Jesus' sacrifice is powerful enough for the sins of all (of which Calvinists would agree) but Allen differs with Calvinists over the application of this saving work of Christ as he basis it on faith. I agree. An Arminian will have no problems with chapter 4. One interesting aspect of this chapter is the number of quotes Allen provides from John Calvin to show that he taught, at times, an unlimited atonement. Allen also provides quotes from Martin Luther to show that he too taught an unlimited atonement.

Chapter 5 A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace by Steve Lemke Lemke's chapter is much like chapter 4 in that I likewise reject irresistible grace and so I found that he and I agreed on all issues concerning this. Lemke shows that while the Bible does say that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them (John 6:44), Lemke shows that God does this through the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:17) and through His grace. Lemke correctly notes that grace can be resisted as we see in the Word (Luke 7:30; Acts 7:51). Arminians will find nothing to disagree with in this chapter and will be built up in our hope of the gospel.

Chapter 6 Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints by Kenneth Keathley I liked the fact that Keathley rejects once saved, always saved. No he is not Arminian in the sense that he believes in the possibility of personal apostasy but he rejects the notion that one only believe once and they remain saved forever (eternal security). Keathley tries to bring together the best of both worlds concerning the Calvinist understanding of perseverance of the saints, eternal security, and the assurance of one's salvation. Does he succeed? I don't think so. Since most Southern Baptist churches hold to eternal security, Keathley follows suit and while he seeks to offer balance while avoiding the word "apostasy" I think he fails here. He doesn't deal with the apostasy passages such as Hebrews 6 or Hebrews 10 and many more. He fails to show the nature of salvation as being conditional (faith and repentance) and the nature of assurance being based on those conditions (mainly continued faith, 1 Peter 1:5). Keathley fails to deal with the

aspect of God's call to holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16) and how that relates to abiding in Christ (1 John 1:5-10). As typical, Keathley seems to adopt the "never saved to begin with" arguments for those who turn away while offering no biblical teaching on this.

**Chapter 7 Was Calvin a "Calvinist"?** by Kevin Kennedy Kennedy shows that John Calvin is simply hard to nail down on Calvinist issues. After reading this chapter, one wonders why Calvinist even call their theology after Calvin? It seems it should be called "Bezaism" but then again that wouldn't sound as good.

**Chapter 8 The Potential Impact of Calvinist Tendencies upon Local Baptist Churches** by Malcolm Yarnell III Yarnell shows that what could happen if Southern Baptist churches embrace Calvinism. He takes us through the history of the Church from Augustine onward to show what has happened to churches and movements that embraced Calvinism from religious intolerance to elitism. The case of Servetus is highlighted in this section.

**Chapter 9 The Public Invitation and Calvinism** by R. Alan Streett This chapter, as the title suggests, deals mainly with the altar call. Streett seeks to show first from the Bible that altar calls or at least the call to make a public confession of faith is biblical. He then turns to Church History and even to Charles Spurgeon to show that many Christians down through the years have used public invitation systems. He ends by looking at the Calvinist Martyn Lloyd-Jones' arguments against the public invitation system. I personally don't reject public confessions as I see baptism as doing that (Acts 2:41). I do think that the evangelical church has gone away from the Bible by substituting the "sinner's prayer" for baptisms. We have made "say this prayer to get saved" the issue rather than testing someone's faith by commanding them to be baptized (Acts 22:16). Jesus said that if we love Him we will obey His commandments (John 14:15) and baptism is commanded by Jesus (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16) and by the Apostles (Acts 2:38). However, this is a well written chapter even though I reject the sinner's prayer as a means to salvation.

**Chapter 10 Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom** by Jeremy Evans In this chapter Evans does a great job of balancing both the biblical teaching and reasoning concerning hard determinism and human freedom. Obviously, these issues have been hotly debated by both theologians and philosophers down through the ages with no true solutions. The key is to find the center of biblical tension which is easier said than done. Evans offers a strong libertarian view of human freedom while emphasizing that God does know all things through His exhaustive foreknowledge. Arminians will no doubt agree.

**Chapter 11 Evil and God's Sovereignty** by Bruce Little This chapter deals with the issues related to how should we view evil and suffering. Calvinists such as John Piper hold that since God knows all things and since He also predetermined all things then everything that happens whether good or evil comes from God alone. This happens not just because of God's sovereignty but also for His glory. Little wastes no time in providing a biblical answer to the issues related to

God's sovereignty, human freedom, and evil. He deals not just with the Bible but also with Piper and other Calvinists who assert that everything that happens happens because God wills it. Little shows that that view does not measure up to the biblical view of God, His creation, and to the reality of evil and Satan. This chapter is great. I have read open theists responses to Piper but I reject the open view because they reject the exhaustive foreknowledge of God. However, Little and I agree. I found such joy in knowing that God is sovereign and yet He is not the direct cause of all things. He permits evil because He allows for a truly free world. Conclusion There were some minor issues I take with the book. My biggest complaint is the avoidance of the word "Arminian". In fact, some of the authors seem to want to be called "moderate Calvinists" though I would label them as "moderate Arminians" at best. They practically hold to four point Arminianism while rejecting the Arminian rejection of eternal security. Like Dr. Caner at Liberty Seminary, they seem to want to simply be "Baptists" instead of Arminian Baptists. Overall an Arminian will enjoy reading this book. You will find bits and pieces that you won't fully agree with if you are not Baptist. Arminians will enjoy the fact that this book addresses the problems with Calvinism that we too have had for 500 years! I do believe this book should be in every Arminians bookshelf.

The first time I remember hearing the term "Calvinism" came from the lips of my Dad and the preachers he would gather in our living room to discuss various aspects of theology for hours upon end. I would listen as the participants would claim 5-points, 4-points, and 3-points. When I got to Bible College and eventually Seminary, I heard the same discussions hashed and re-hashed numerous times. I learned quickly most of the discussion centered on logical argumentation and quoting various theologians, commentators, and authors. Of course everyone had their favorite passages of Scripture to quote in their favor. Yet often the arguments were reduced to 5-point Calvinist appealing to the Sovereignty and Glory of God, while others would appeal to a need for a genuine evangelistic message. As I continued to study the issues I observed a few facts. First, I found myself in agreement with many 5-point Calvinists on some things. I also found myself in agreement with Non-Calvinists on some things. Second, I found that depending on the passage I would preach, my Calvinist friends often assumed I was a Non-Calvinist, while my Non-Calvinist friends assumed I was a Calvinist. Eventually I came to the conclusion the reason for this phenomenon was because I place a higher emphasis on Hermeneutics than on Systematic Theology. Therefore I determined not to be labeled by "points" in any theological system. Rather, I would prefer to sit down and discuss what I believe about specific passages of Scripture where the battle lines are often drawn. Another fact came to surface in my examination of the subject. There

were many authors who proposed good arguments for a 5-Point Calvinist position. However, most of the works I read that purported to offer an alternative reduced themselves to attack mode. I heard good arguments in discussions but struggled to find a fair and kind written treatment offering a legitimate alternative to 5-Point Calvinism. That is, until I read *Whosoever Will*. This work presents a fair assessment of 5-Point Calvinism and offers an alternative look at the key doctrines. With contributions from several respected theologians part one details alternatives to TULIP as well as a great sermon by Dr. Jerry Vines. Part two rounds out the volume with a discussion of 5 practical, theological and philosophical discussions. Whatever your position on 5-Point Calvinism you will find this work to be an honest attempt to offer a clearly Biblical alternative, without waging war against the other side. Like me, you will most likely find places of agreement and disagreement. Furthermore, you will be motivated to additional study of the great doctrine of Salvation. I commend this volume to you asking only that you encounter the work with a fresh attempt to delve into the very things "angles desire to look into." (1 Peter 1:12)

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