Hyper-Calvinism: A False Doctrine
**By Dr. John R. Rice**

Through the years there has been a conflict between the doctrine of eternal salvation by grace through faith, not of works, and the doctrine of salvation partly by God's grace and partly by man's works or by deserving it or by faithfulness. We know that all false religions teach salvation by good works, character, human merit, or rites, not the free salvation given instantly to penitent, believing sinners, wholly by grace. But many Christian groups tend to include works or mourning or faithfulness as the way to get saved and the price of keeping saved. Those who believe men must "hold out faithful" to keep saved and think they will never be surely eternally safe until they reach Heaven are of what is called the Armenian position because it was so insistently taught by Arminius. Wesley and his followers held to this position, as do all who think a saved person can be lost.

**I. WHAT IS HYPER-CALVINISM?**

Those who believe in eternal salvation wholly of grace are usually called Calvinists simply because, in the Protestant Reformation, Calvin strongly emphasized that doctrine long contradicted under the Roman heresy of salvation by merit and church rites. So any person who is not Armenian in faith but rather believes in eternal security of the believer is likely to describe himself as a Calvinist. Or where Calvinism has not been carried to its more unscriptural, unevangelistic, arrogant extreme, one might probably call himself a "moderate" Calvinist. Most of those who might be called Calvinists do not believe in a limited atonement, for example, nor do they believe that some are foreordained by unconditioned election to go to Hell and so could not be saved, that salvation was never provided for nor offered for them. But they do believe in eternal salvation by grace, the principal truth Calvin emphasized.

Those who do believe a doctrine of God's limited love, limited grace, limited atonement, and unchangeable plan to damn millions who could not be saved, are called hyper-Calvinists.

These extreme doctrines were first taught somewhat by Augustine. Then for about a thousand years no one found them in the Bible, of course, till Calvin developed such a theology. Adopting the theory men then persuaded themselves that they find it in the Bible.

Salvation by grace, eternal salvation, without works, is a Bible doctrine. I believe hyper-Calvinism is not a Bible doctrine but is a perversion by proud intellectuals who thus may try to excuse themselves from any spiritual accountability for winning souls.

**II. EXAMINE THE DOCTRINE OF HYPER-CALVINISM**

Those whom we call hyper-Calvinists usually outline their doctrinal position as represented by the letters TULIP:

* **T** for *Total Depravity* of the sinner
* **U** for *Unconditional Election*
* **L** for *Limited Atonement*
* **I** for *Irresistible Grace*
* **P** for *Perseverance* of the saints

**Sinners Are Depraved, Cannot Be Saved Unless God Calls,
but All Have Some Light, Some Calling**

The hyper-Calvinist says sinners are totally depraved and so incapable of repentance except as God calls some selected individuals, and leaves others He has predestined for Hell, unable to repent.

Now the doctrine that all are sinful, incapable of being saved or doing good without God's help, is true. But it is certainly not true that some never could repent, that God leaves some intentionally without light or calling. Consider these Scriptures:

**a**. **"God... now commandeth all men every where to repent"** (Acts 17:30). Can anyone accuse God of commanding people to do what He has made it impossible for them to do?

**b**. The apostle said, after hearing of Cornelius' conversion, **"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"** (Acts 11:18). God granted repentance to the Jews; now they see repentance is granted *"to the Gentiles"* -- not to a few selected individuals, but to the Gentiles, as to Jews.

**c**. In John 1:9 we are told about Jesus, **"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."** So every man in the world has light from God and from Christ, and so could be saved.

**d**. In John 12:32,33, Jesus said, **"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die."** When Jesus draws **"all men"** unto Him, then any one of **"all men"** could be saved.

**e**. Romans 1:18-21 says that after the flood, the races became heathen, idolaters, barbarians, and are without excuse because the truth of God was manifested unto them. It says:

**"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"**

**f**. Psalm 19:1-4 tells us:

**"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun."**

So there is a speech in nature to turn men to seek God. It speaks in all the world and every man is therefore accountable to God for it.

**g**. Romans 2:11-16 says:

**"For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be jasitfied. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another,) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."**

Does that not mean that every person in the world is warned from God, either by the Word or by God speaking through the law He has written in their hearts, that is, their consciences?

And God, in this matter, has **"no respect of persons,"** we are told here, giving every man alike a call to be saved. All who seek more light find enough light even as Cornelius did in Acts 10.

Man's sinfulness does not mean some men could not be saved.

**h**. We are told that **"the gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation"** (Rom. 1:16). And again Hebrews 4:12 says, **"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"** Does not that Scripture surely mean that the Scriptures themselves call men to repentance? And would you say, like the neo-orthodox teachers who do not accept the Bible as objectively the Word of God, that it becomes the Word of God to individuals only as it affects them? No, the very nature of the powerful Word of God, **"sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow,"** means that it acts upon all who hear it. And again, we read in I Corinthians 1:21 that **"it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"** And that means, of course, the preaching of the Gospel of the Word of God. The Word of God itself has supernatural power to affect the lost sinner, and it needs only to be **"mixed with faith"** (Heb. 4:9.) to save the sinner.

So every lost sinner is in some sense lighted by Jesus who **"lighteth every man that cometh into the world"** (John 1:9), is somewhat moved by his conscience, is preached to by the creation about him, and when he hears the Word of God he is called by that. Then the fact of the depravity of every lost sinner does not mean there are some sinners who cannot be saved.

**"Unconditional Election" Is Not Bible Doctrine**

It is true the saved are God's elect, **"chosen... in him before the foundation of the world,"** as Ephesians 1:4 tells us. But it is wrong to make this election a whim of God whereby He saves some, compels them to be saved, and damns some whom He has decided He does not wish to save. No, election is not "unconditional." It is simply that God knows who will trust Him when they hear the Gospel and chooses them to be carried through till they be **"conformed to the image of his Son."**

Romans 8:28-30 tell. us so; thus:

**"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."**

God gives the order of things here. First, foreknowledge, then predestination, then calling, then saving, then finally, at the resurrection, glorifying. To ignore or to change the inspired, divine order is false doctrine. Again, I Peter 1:2 says that the saints addressed were **"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."** That is a flat contradiction of so-called "unconditional election." Election is based on God's foreknowledge of who will trust Christ. So salvation depends upon personal faith in Christ.

**The Term "Limited Atonement" Really Means Limited Love, Limited Grace of God,
and So Slanders God, and Is Unscriptural**

The heart of hyper-Calvinist doctrine is the "Limited Atonement" claim, that Christ did not die for all men, made no provision for them so they could possibly be saved. It really claims that God did not love all men enough to have Christ die for all, that His grace is limited, so is finite instead of infinite. But this is contradicted by many plain Scriptures.

**a**. John 3:16 says that **"God so loved *THE WORLD,* that he gave his only begotten Son"** -- that it was so that "whosoever" could believe on Him and be saved. No limited love or atonement in John 3:16!

**b**. In John 1:29 we read the inspired statenent of John the Baptist about Jesus, **"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,"** Since Christ atoned for **"the sin of the world,"** not just part of the sin of the world, it could not be a limited atonement.

**c**. First John 2:2 plainly says, **"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."** No limited atonement there!

**d**. Romans 5:20 says, **"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."** Does not that mean God has grace for all the sin in the world, and even a great surplus? So the total number of people who will ever be born on the earth is a *finite* counted number that God knows. But the grace of God is infinite, much more than for those who will be saved, even much more than for all the sins of all the people in the world, so says the plain Word of God. Romans 5:20 leaves no limit on the atonement

**e**. First Timothy 4:10 tells of **"the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."** To those who believe, Christ is a *special,* personal, accepted Saviour. But to all who have not believed He is potentially and intentionally a Saviour. When God says in the Bible that He has provided a **"Saviour of all men,"** what an arrogant wresting of Scriptures it is to say He did not provide and offer salvation for all!

**f**. Colossians 1:20 tells us that Christ, **"having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."** Note that that verse speaks, not of all accepting Christ, but of atonement for all, amnesty offered every rebel, a peace treaty prepared to end the war between God and the sinner. If Christ, **"through the blood of his cross,"** intended **"to reconcile all things unto himself,"** as that verse says, who dares put a limit on that atoning blood, so offered for all?

**God's Grace Is Not Irresistible;
Some Are Not Compelled to Be Saved Unconditionally,
Others Compelled to Be Damned**

The fourth part of the doctrine of hyper-Calvinism, represented by the letter "I" in TULIP, is "Irresistible Grace," by which it is meant that all who are elected to be saved will be saved, that they cannot resist this special grace limited to them but will be saved when God calls. It would necessarily follow, first, that those not elected are irresistibly damned, cannot be saved; and, second, that since God works irresistibly to save or damn, Christians cannot affect the salvation or damnation of sinners and need feel no responsibility or burden about it. But this is wrong, unscriptural, and no doubt Satan uses this doctrine of "Irresistible Grace" to lull Christians to disobedience and lack of compassion and burden to get people saved.

Consider these Scriptures which prove sinners can and do resist God's grace and many are lost who could be saved, and refuse Christ.

**a**. In II Peter 3:9 we read, **"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"** Then God desires all men to be saved. And as we showed in section 1, all are enlightened to some degree, and called.

So many resist the grace of God.

**b**. We are commanded to pray for **"all men,"** says I Timothy 2:1, and verses 3 and 4 tell us, **"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who will have ALL MEN to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."** We should pray for all men because God our Saviour **"will have all men to be saved."** So God would have all saved, but some will not be saved. So God's grace may he resisted.

**c**. We are told that Jesus wept over Jerusalem and told the sadness of His heart that His love and grace were refused. He said, in Matthew 23:37, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"** Jesus said, **"I would," "and ye would not."** So His grace was rejected. It was not irresistible.

**d**. In Proverbs 1:24,25, we have a clear statement that God, personified as Wisdom, calls and men refuse. That Scripture says, **"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof."** And the context plainly teaches that the refusal is final and those who so refused God's wisdom and **"did not choose the fear of the Lord"** went to destruction. Surely, then, people do reject the call of God and resist His grace.

**e**. Paul says in Galatians 2:21, **"I do not frustrate the grace of God?"** That clearly shows then that those Galatian teachers who teach salvation by the law do frustrate the grace of God. Grace is not irresistible.

And did not you, my reader, long resist God's grace? Only very few were saved the first time they heard the Gospel at the first conviction of sin they felt! Did you not for a time resist God's grace? One who resists one time may resist the last time. And so many continue to resist and are lost forever.

**f**. In fact, the unpardonable sin is surely the sin of a lost man or woman, greatly enlightened and convicted, who comes to a final and irrevocable choice so that God's Spirit gives him up. Genesis 6:3 says, **"My spirit shall not always strive with man."** He does strive -- resisted to a certain point He sometimes strives no more, so the sin is unpardonable. If the Spirit who strives, then when men resist, may cease forever striving, then grace is not irresistible.

Hebrew 6:4-6 says, I think, the same thing:

**"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers af the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame"**

The term **"partakers of the Holy Ghost,"** Dr. Scofield says, here is "Gr. *metochous, going along with."* So the Scripture here speaks of one not born of the Spirit but one who is followed, warned, convicted by the Holy Spirit going along with him. He has felt or **"tasted"** the **"powers of the world to come,"** we are told; has **"tasted the good word of God,"** but refuses Christ, still falls away from that conviction and, after coming to the verge of repentance, turns from it; it is impossible to renew such an one to repentance. So it is with those who, called, convicted, brought to the very crisis of decision, decide finally, eternally against Christ. Oh, every sinner who commits the unpardonable sin does resist the grace of God to the last. So we think did Pharaoh, Judas and, we think, those Pharisees of Matthew 12:24-32 who said Jesus cast out devils by Beelzebub but in heart knew better and blasphemously fought the Holy Spirit who convicted them. God's grace is not irresistible.

**The Saints Do Finally Persevere**

The P in TULIP stands for final "Perseverance" of the saints. In this, all Bible believers must agree if we mean simply that those who are saved have everlasting life. I think a better way to say it is the Preservation of the saints. I do not believe Christians always do right. They do not get salvation by works and they cannot keep it by works. So our righteousness is the righteousness of Christ who died in our place, paid for all our sins, and gives us eternal life freely when we believe on Christ. So John 5:24 says plainly, **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."**

So in John 10:27-29 Jesus said, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."**

And Paul the apostle could say by infallible inspiration, **"... for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day"** (II Tim. 1:12).

**III. WHY FOLLOW MEN?**

Do you follow Arminius? or Wesley? Then you are certain to be wrong wherever those good but frail men were wrong. Do you follow Calvin? Then whatever doctrine Calvin formulated or invented will be wrong for you as for him.

Charles Spurgeon, great and blessed London preacher, was a Calvinist though he spoke against "hyper-Calvinism," and called it that; and his hyper-Calvinist friends criticized him for preaching that "whosoever will" may come.

In his sermon on Sunday morning, March 24, 1861, on Isaiah 1:18, Spurgeon said:

**OUR TEXT ADDRESSED TO SINNERS OF THE DEEPEST DYE**

**Some of my brethren are greatly scandalized by the general invitations which I am in the habit of giving to sinners, as sinners. Some of them go the length of asserting that there are no universal invitations in the Word of God. Their assertion, however, is not so forcible an argument as a fact, and we have one here. Here is most plainly an invitation addressed to sinners who had not even the qualification of sensibility. They did not feel their need of a Saviour. They had been scourged and flogged till the whole body was a mass of sores, and yet they would not turn to the Hand that smote them, but went on sinning still. A more accurate description of careless, worthless, ungodly, abandoned souls, never was given anywhere. We have in the context one of the most graphic descriptions of human nature in its utterly lost and godless estate. There is not a single gleam of light in the midst of the thick darkness. The man is bad-bad-bad from the beginning to the end. Nay, he is all the worst, and the worst is come to its worst. There is not a ray of promise in their nature, not a glimmer of anything good in the description of the persons to whom this text is addressed.**

So Spurgeon did not really believe all the points of hyper-Calvinism, did not believe that some sinners are not called or could not repent.

<>In the same sermon, he says,

**Furthermore, I think that in giving this description, I shall be better preaching the Gospel than during the other parts of the sermon. Let me remind you that the invitation of the text is sent to men who appeared to have been totally depraved from the sole of the foot even to the head.** [The emphasis is Spurgeon's.]

Again, in the same sermon, Spurgeon said,

**Yes, Mercy Offered to "Every One of You"**

**I have a big net this morning -- Oh, that we might all be caught in its meshes! There is not one of us today who can be exempt from this invitation; not even that poor soul yonder who shivers in his shoes because he fears that he has committed the unpardonable sin, --**

**None are excluded hence, but those
Who do themselves exclude;
Welcome the learned and polite,
The ignorant and rude.**

**"Repent, and be baptized every one of you," said Peter. As John Bunyan puts it -- one man might have stood up in the crowd and said, "But I helped to hound Him to the cross! .... Repent, and be baptized *every one of you."* "But I drove the nails into His hands!" saith one. *"Every one of you,"* says Peter. "But I pierced His side!" said another. "Every one of you," said Peter. "And I put my tongue into my cheek and stared at His nakedness and said, 'If He be the Son of God, let Him come down from the cross.'" .... Every one of.you," said Peter. "Repent, and be baptized *every one of you."* I do feel so grieved at many of our Calvinistic brethren; they know nothing about Calvinism, I am sorry to say, for never was any man more caricatured by his professed followers than John Calvin. Many of them are afraid to preach from Peter's text, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you." When I do it, they say, "He is unsound."**

**Well, if I am unsound on this point, I have all the Puritans with me -- the whole of them almost without a single exception. John Bunyan first and foremost preaches to Jerusalem sinners; and Charnock, you know, has written a book, *The Chief of Sinners, Objects of the Choicest Mercy.* But I do not care for that; I know the Lord has blessed my appeals to all sorts of sinners, and none shall stay me in giving free invitations as long as I find them in this Book. And I do cry with Peter this morning to this vast assembly, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ .... For the promise is unto you, and to your children... even as many as the Lord our God shall call."**

So Spurgeon was a Calvinist and said so, but he did not accept all the doctrines of hyper-Calvinism, and he said so.

In truth, the false doctrines of hyper-Calvinism would not do so much harm if they were emphasized as little as Spurgeon emphasized them, and particularly, if those who advocate them worked unceasingly to win souls as Spurgeon did.

But why follow Spurgeon? He was human. He was an amazing preacher, an evangelist. Some think he was the greatest preacher since the Apostle Paul. But when he was wrong he was wrong. He plainly said he did not know enough about the return of Christ to preach on it. No man is perfect. It would be as foolish to follow Spurgeon in whatever part of the false doctrine of hyper-Calvinism he believed as to follow him in smoking cigars. He saw the error of smoking a little while before he went to Heaven, and I am sure he saw the errors of hyper-Calvinism, besides those he himself criticized, as soon as he reached Heaven. Why not just follow the Bible instead of Arminius or Calvin or Wesley or Spurgeon?

**IV. GOD NEVER IS PARTY TO SIN, NEVER ARRANGES SO ONE MUST SIN**

Did God plan every evil, every sin that men have ever committed? Did God predestine Adam and Eve to sin? Did He plan and bring about the rebellion of Satan, once Lucifer, an angel of light; and did He bring about the fall of the angels that fell? We must agree that God knew all the future, but can we say that all the sin really originated in the heart and planning of God? No! Surely such a thought is abhorrent to every spiritual mind. The Bible does not teach it.

God planned and elected much in the lives of all men, but not the sin. Men themselves do not have to sin. They sin because they are sinful and can choose to sin, or choose the path that leads to sin.

A man cannot choose the date of his birth, nor the place he is born, nor his parents. He cannot choose the color of his eyes, the shape of his face, the talents or limitations with which he may be born. Many of the things that happen to one he cannot control, but on moral issues, issues of right and wrong, man can choose and must choose. Election does not settle the choice anyone makes about sin or salvation.

Four great truths show that man is not coerced to sin, that sin and rejection of Christ are moral issues in which man always has a choice.

**There Are God's Commands Which Men Can Obey or Disobey**

God never commands a man to "be born in Chicago on June 30th." God settles that, with the person affected having no choice, no responsibility to obey or refuse. But on moral matters, right and wrong are clearly set forth in God's commands. The "Thou shalt not's" of the Bible show that on moral issues men have a choice to make and do make a choice.

**God Gives Man a Conscience to Tell Him Right and Wrong**

The Scripture says, **"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly"** (Prov. 20:27). On other matters men must decide; with no moral issue involved, a man does not have inward light always. Should he buy this house at this price? Should he have a Ford car or a Chevrolet? Conscience has no answer. One may ask God for wisdom and have help, but conscience says only, "This is right" or "That is wrong." So "that little spark of celestial fire called conscience" proves God gives inward light so one can choose right on issues of moral and spiritual duty. Men are not so predestined that they must sin or must reject Christ.

**A Way of Escape From Sin Always Provided**

Has God made man so, and provided circumstances so that a man can not avoid sinning in a given instance? No, for we are plainly told in I Corinthians 10:12,13,

**"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"**

So if one takes heed he need not fall. Always a way of escape is provided. God is faithful to not only allow one to take heed and choose not to sin, but also makes a way of escape in every case. In any particular case men may have help, may escape sin. So men are not predestined to sin or to reject the Saviour.

**Men Come to Judgment for Their Sins, Are Accountable, So They Need Not Blame God Nor Predestination for Sins**

For every idle word men shall come to judgment, Jesus said (Matt 12:36). And Revelation 20:12 tells us that the unsaved dead will be judged "according to their works," which are meticulously recorded. Does not that prove that in moral matters man is accountable and must choose?

God chose Jacob to head a nation for Him, and rejected Esau. That was predestined before they were born (Rom. 9:11-13). But Esau, while rejected as head of a tribe through which God would bring the Saviour, was not predestined to go to Hell, and for all we know may have been saved.

Pharaoh was a wicked, murderous man, and in the matter of letting Israel go from Egypt, God had raised him up to make an example of him and kill him ( Rom. 9:17,18). But there is no evidence that God predestined him to go to Hell. He could have chosen to be saved. Knowing ahead of time what Pharaoh would do, God planned to make an example of His destruction of a wicked king.

Hyper-Calvinism is unscriptural, false doctrine. It tends to flourish in intellectual pride and in neglect of soul winning, and is a symptom of moral guilt. It is Satan's effort to kill concern and compassion for souls.