

# Book Review

## **SAVED BY GRACE**

### **A Study of the 5 Points of Calvinism**

*by*

***Ronald Cammenga & Ronald Hanko***

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**With student's Workbook.**

Not since the appearance of Lorraine Boettner's evergreen tome, "The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination" has there, I believe, appeared another unfolding of the Doctrines of Grace, so marked with crystal clear clarity, combined with a satisfying profundity and faithfulness to Scripture until this present volume, subject of this review.

At 257 + X pages this book is somewhat shorter than Boettner's, but if anything, that actually enhances it for the role it was evidently designed to fulfil, namely, the education of young people [and the not-so-young!] into the cardinal dogmas of the Reformed Faith as expressed in the deliberations of Dordrecht and Westminster.

"Active learning" has been a 'buzz' concept in education for some time now. An old Chinese proverb ran something like this : "I hear, and I forget. I see, and I understand. I do, and I remember." With this in mind, one can understand how the authors, both of them ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches of the USA, put together this instructive and edifying work, and included with it a Student's Workbook. This astute practical touch enhances the work even more, and if the book is a delight to read, then the workbook facilitates the impression of the doctrines on the mind of the student. This active mental activity is of course, essential to true learning. One rarely learns *and remembers* much from books by simply reading them. The mental activity required to fill in the workbook fulfills nicely the dictums embodied in the old Chinese proverb. This, of course, was a concept well known to the ancient theologians of the Church and to the Reformers, whose method in all these things was to formulate catechisms.....these again being devices which force the student into recall situations, thus impressing the lessons deeply on the memory. One should ponder this principle carefully in this hedonistic age in which we live, when we tend to read books just for enjoyment, and subsequently forget 90% and more of what we read in them. Unless we can remember what is taught in these tomes, how can we live by it ? This present volume certainly addresses that problem.

Beginning with an excellently written chapter on the "Sovereignty of God", the authors follow through with a chapter on each of the five points of Calvinism, followed by a list of further books recommended for reading, then two appendices, the first being extensive citations from the Creeds [Heidelberg Catechism; Belgic Confession; the Canons of Dordt, and the Westminster Standards], arranged in six sections each correlative to one of the chapters in the book. The final appendix is an index of some **362** Scripture passages utilized in a total of **477** citations within the book, that works out at nearly three Scripture citations, many of which are printed in full, to each page of the six teaching chapters to which the Scripture index refers. Veritably, the work is permeated with the Word of God, and carries a value not only as a text-book for learning, but also as a reference source. Not only its text, but also its appendix of Confessional Quotations is of excellent utility, specially for those who do not have access to copies of these important doctrinal creeds.

Both Text and Work books are excellently presented in attractive covers, with a print size of easily readable and pleasing proportions, approximately thus :

**The doctrine of perseverance is a most valuable treasure.....**

In content, the aim of the authors has been to expound God's Sovereignty in Salvation along the lines of the mnemonic TULIP, and under each heading the typical chapter evolves logically viz.

- A. The Doctrine.**
- B. Scripture Passages** relevant, with comments.
- C. Difficult Passages**, with explanatory comments.
- D. Objections**, duly adumbrated and judiciously criticised and refuted.
- E. Denials of the Doctrine** under consideration analysed, criticised and refuted.
- F. Practical Importance** of the Doctrine, how it bears on the Christian life.
- G. Relations** to the Other Four Points.

Each section **A, B**, etc., may be broken down into further sub-sections. For instance, the section on Total Depravity considers the differences between the false doctrine that total depravity does not mean total corruption, and the true Scriptural position that maintains the contrary. Likewise, the notions of 'common grace' and 'free-offerism' are considered under this heading, noting how both these modern deviations from orthodox Calvinism carry implications that undermine the doctrine of Total Depravity. Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism, are adumbrated under the sub-heading "Denials of Total Depravity", and, like 'common grace' and the 'free offer', they crop up for consideration again under the headings of other chapters as appropriate.

Permeating all this are the abundant Scripture references, many printed in full, which come in like an avalanche to sweep away any doubts or objections and to

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establish the truth in all its veracity as the Word of God.

The clear logical tidiness of the book befits the Scriptural apostolic command to “do all things decently and in order” [ 1 Cor. 14 : 40], and is of course, of vital importance in the matter of instruction. Untidy lesson structure can be a characteristic all too prevalent amongst teachers and contributes to confusion amongst the students, but such strictures are certainly not applicable to this book. It is not necessary to be prolix like the Puritans, in order to be profound and plenary in one’s teaching method, on the contrary, profundity is better conveyed in simple, logical, “bytes”, as it were, which the student can take in “byte” at a time, and gain a proper understanding of what he or she is taking in. Logical structure is also more easily retained in the memory, and more easily mentally traced for recall as and when required.

Many today in theological circles are wary of ‘logicality’, and do not like to see things set out clearly as epitomized by Cammenga and Hanko’s work in this volume. Against such objectors it must be asserted herewith that the prime purpose of a text-book is not to display the author’s profound learning in a heady plethora of dazzling literary pyro-technics that bamboozle the reader. No, the primary purpose of a text-book is to teach, to make the material assimilable by the students who are expected to read it, and above all, to glorify God in so doing as it leads those students into a deeper appreciation of His Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness and Truth, and through all that to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. By that high standard this volume and its workbook must be given high marks indeed.

We unhesitatingly commend it for its faithful Scriptural and Confessional orthodoxy and its utility as a teaching source, and would exhort all Christians, young and old, who are needing to grasp the Reformed Faith in all its pristine Scriptural purity, to purchase these two volumes, and to work through them diligently. And we might say, too, that the experienced and well-read ‘theological Christian’ would benefit from them.....they provide a veritable “refresher course” in those vital things that we should all keep well primed in our minds.

*Readers may obtain these volumes from the Covenant Reformed Bookstore in Northern Ireland. To do so they should enquire with the Book Secretary, Mr. Sean Courtney, whom they can contact on : 01266 41200 [Overseas readers should prefix the appropriate United Kingdom code for dialling from their country].*

**Take heed unto thyself, and unto the DOCTRINE; continue in them: for in so doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.**

*1 Timothy 4 : 16*