

Why I Am a Calvinist, Part 3

Scripture: 1 John 4:19

Code: A343

by Phil Johnson

. . . and why every Christian is a Calvinist of sorts.

Part III: Some book recommendations

Before we go further in this series, let me recommend a handful of books. The first book I want to recommend is a new book by Roger Olson, who is himself an Arminian, and he has written a defense of Arminianism titled *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. You might be surprised to hear me recommend this book because I published a review of it [on my weblog](#) a few months ago, and the review wasn't altogether positive. The review was written by my friend Gary Johnson, who is pastor of The Church Of The Redeemer in Mesa, Arizona. Gary's mentor, by the way, was S. Lewis Johnson. And even though we are all three named Johnson, none of us are related. (Though I would be very happy to be related to either S. Lewis Johnson or Gary Johnson.) Anyway, Gary's review was in several parts, and he titled it "Calvinists in the Hands of an Angry Arminian." So it wasn't a completely positive review, and I agree with practically all of Gary's complaints about the book.

But I have to say that Olson's book is the best book in defense of Arminianism I've ever read. Some readers might be aware that I didn't have a very high opinion of Dave Hunt's anti-Calvinistic screed. When I reviewed Hunt's book in a Shepherds' Conference seminar a few years ago, someone told me the only reason I hated the book was because I'm a Calvinist and Hunt stepped on my toes.

And I said, "No, it's just a really bad book, written by a guy who has no clue what he is talking about."

My friend challenged that: "Name one well-written book, written after 1950, either defending Arminianism or attacking Calvinism, written by someone who *does* know what he is talking about."

I admit it; I was stumped. But now Roger Olson has bailed me out. If anyone ever asks me that question again, I can point to Olson's book. It's a good defense of Arminianism, and although I disagree with virtually all his conclusions, he pretty much knows what he is talking about, and he explains the differences between Arminianism, Pelagianism, and semi-pelagianism pretty well.

If you read that book, you'll need to read at least three or four good Calvinist books to get the taste out of your mouth. So I'll recommend three. Two are standard works that I routinely recommend every year. The first is a massive syllabus, written by Curt Daniel, called *The History and Theology of Calvinism*. These are notes Dr. Daniel wrote when he taught this material, and [the tapes of his teaching](#) are downloadable for free from the internet. Dr. Daniel is currently working on developing that material in book form, to be published by P&R.

The other standard work you must have is the book by David Steele, Curtis Thomas, Lance Quinn, titled *The Five Points of Calvinism* (also by P&R). It is an encyclopedic collection of key Scripture references and some wonderful essays explaining and defending Calvinism from the Bible.

And then one of my favorite books — hard to find for a long time but recently published in a quality edition by Audobon Press, *The Great Invitation*, by Erroll Hulse, subtitled “Examining the use of the altar call in evangelism.” The book deals with the question of altar calls, as the subtitle suggests, but it’s greatest value, I think, is that this is a classic example of the kind of warm-hearted, evangelistic, classic Calvinism that I appreciate, and it’s a great antidote to the ugly Calvinism I spoke about that you find in Internet forums. Erroll Hulse is a greatly respected British Reformed Baptist leader, and this is one of my all-time favorite books.

This post is adapted from a transcript of a seminar from the 2007 Shepherds’ Conference, titled “Closet Calvinists.”

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