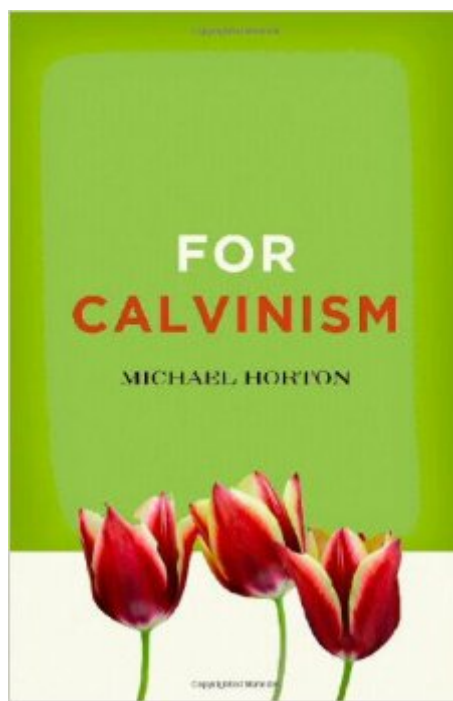


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For Calvinism



Synopsis

The system of theology known as Calvinism has been immensely influential for the past five hundred years, but it is often encountered negatively as a fatalistic belief system that confines human freedom and renders human action and choice irrelevant. Taking us beyond the caricatures, Michael Horton invites us to explore the teachings of Calvinism, also commonly known as Reformed theology, by showing us how it is biblical and God-centered, leading us to live our lives for the glory of God. Horton explores the historical roots of Calvinism, walking readers through the distinctive known as the "Five Points," and encouraging us to consider its rich resources for faith and practice in the 21st Century. As a companion to Roger Olson's *Against Calvinism*, readers will be able to compare contrasting perspectives and form their own opinions on the merits and weaknesses of Calvinism.

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Customer Reviews

Michael Horton according to Roger E. Olson (the author of "Against Calvinism") in the forward of this book writes, "Anyone interested in reading the best case possible for Calvinism must read this book. It is informative, engaging, clear, and self-critical." I would like to use Olson's own adjectives to give 4 reasons why Arminians, Calvinists, or the undecided should take the time to carefully read this book. 1) It is Informative - the author takes the time to clearly articulate the historical developments preceding the debates before the Reformation, and the resulting consequences leading to our very day. He concisely and cogently defines, describes, and exegetes the key figures, movements, and

factors that brought about the distinct views that have come to be known (for better or worse) as Calvinism and Arminianism. The author does a fantastic job of synthesizing the historical, philosophical, and biblical exegetical elements that make up what we call Calvinism today. Incidentally, Horton makes a great case for why we should call Calvinism the "doctrines of grace" and how this is really what the Bible, Calvin, and many reformers before and after him would prefer - because it isn't about articulating one man's "system," but more about what the Bible says from Genesis to Revelation regarding God, man, sin, salvation, and consummation. There is more to Calvinism than the acrostic Tulip.²) It is engaging - from tackling misconceptions and misperceptions, Horton pulls the reader into the controversy, but does a fantastic job of disseminating the truth and dispelling the falsehoods of both Calvinism and Arminianism. He has great integrity in seeking to focus on the best of Calvinism and the best of Arminianism and then honing in on what the Bible has to say about the crucial doctrines and how they are interpreted in both camps. I love how Horton develops what he says early on in the book, "It has become a habit to speak of 'the Reformed faith,' but properly speaking there is no such thing. There is only the Christian faith, which is founded on the teaching of the prophets, and apostles, with Jesus Christ as its cornerstone. It is better, then, to speak of the Reformed Confession of the Christian Faith." In other words, Horton is seeking to articulate what the Bible teaches - the Christian faith - what all Christians believe - because it is merely the "faith delivered once and for all to the saints." He is more concerned about Christians having a biblical theology, than merely adhering to a system of theology.³) It is clear - Horton deals with an incredibly wide expanse of material and synthesizes it all with great theological insight, exegetical precision, and practical wisdom. One of the most outstanding features of the book is when he writes about the missional impact that true Calvinists have made and are making because of their understanding of, and desire to obey the great commission.⁴) It is self-critical - Especially in the last chapter of the book Horton dissects the strengths and weaknesses of Calvinism throughout history and today. He is humble, honest, bold, and courageous in his personal and corporate diagnosis of modern Calvinism, and in rebuking and exhorting all believers to be balanced in their love of God, truth, other believers, and the lost. I highly recommend this book in that it will do several things: it will help you understand theology better, its historical development, and it will help you to be a more careful interpreter of the Scriptures. I believe that it will be used to help Arminians, Calvinists, and the undecided to be careful students of the Word, of church history, and to be gracious toward one another in their pursuit of the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. It will help you to wrestle with doctrine and make you better equipped to know what you believe and why you believe it. It will help you to appreciate your salvation even

more because of the heights and depths of a Holy God that has sought us, and bought us, with His redeeming blood. It will encourage you to share the good news with passionate precision of a Savior who has come to seek and to save the lost.

I have also posted a review of *Against Calvinism*, which is a part of a two book set. I have now finished the second book, *For Calvinism* (2011) by Michael Horton. Before I proceed, I should confess a few biases. First, as I have studied, the Calvinistic understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation makes more sense to me than the Arminian position defended by Roger Olson in *Against Calvinism*. Second, Michael Horton is one of my favorite authors and speakers. Certainly, these things affect my perspective on these books. So, having stated that, from what I could see, Horton seems to depend upon scripture to a greater degree than Olson did to establish his arguments for Calvinism. While Olson found Calvinism logically inconceivable and morally reprehensible, Horton seeks to describe what Scripture says. I find this to be true of most Calvinists (e.g., John Piper, Charles Spurgeon)--they try to account for all of Scripture. Further, although Olson dealt almost exclusively with TULIP (a term Horton doesn't care for), Horton moves beyond to consider more broadly Reformed beliefs and doctrine. As a general defense of TULIP, I prefer Sproul's *Chosen by God*, yet this is a fine volume in that regard as well. A drawback of the book, and of reformed theology in general, seems to be an overreliance upon the creeds and confessions. Although I generally agree with early creeds and much of reformed confessions (Heidelberg, Westminster), they are not to be the grounding for our belief. God's word is. On the whole, I would commend these two volumes. Although I still think Calvinism is the best explanation for all of Scripture, Olson argues his point well. Horton, as always, is a humble, wise, and articulate defender of confessional Calvinism. (I also wrote the following after listening to a debate/discussion between Olson and Horton) Michael Horton and Roger Olson have recently put out a pair of books, *For Calvinism* (Horton) and *Against Calvinism* (Olson). I have appreciated Horton's ministry through the White Horse Inn for a few years and he has, in some ways, shaped my thinking. I know less of Olson, a theology professor at Baylor University, except to say that I am familiar that he is one of the most vocal advocates for Arminianism today. I recently listened to a 2 part "conversation" between Horton and Olson regarding the topic, "For or Against Calvinism." It was encouraging to listen to these two brothers in the faith discussing their dissenting views on this issue. I wish more theological conversations would happen in this way. Here were a few brief takeaways. There is much overlap between them. They appear to agree on the majors. Olson was a gracious, intelligent advocate of Arminianism. I have read his blog in the past, but I found him more endearing and less adversarial

in this setting. Horton seemed to rely upon the biblical evidence more than Olson, who seemed rather to make his arguments based more upon his belief in what, or Who, God should be. For example, he cited John Wesley, who claimed that Romans 9 cannot be saying what it appears to say and so there must be another explanation. Both men seem to agree that there is a lack of Arminian theologians throughout history. At one point, Horton mentioned Jacob Arminius and John Wesley and Olson quipped, are there any others, showing his hand that "his team" may lack a strong, or at least visible, tradition. In the end, I have a deeper appreciation for Arminianism, but a continued confidence in Calvinism.

One of the things that I have learned as I age is that theology can be as dry as a Calculus text or as attention getting as a well written fictional adventure. Michael Horton's "For Calvinism" easily fits into this latter category. It was with some trepidation that I first picked up this, the first of two books commissioned by Zondervan, evaluating Calvinism. As an established Arminian trained in a Calvinist seminary, I have been disappointed over the years at both Wesleyan and Calvinist who tend to set straw men to define those who have followed alternative opinion. Michael Horton attempts in this book to clearly state a traditional Calvinist position - he is not defending TULIP, but a clearly stated version of the Reformed position as articulated by Calvin and his heirs. When he does choose to compare Calvinism to Arminianism, he chooses from both classical theologians (e.g. Richard Watson) and more modern spokesman (e.g. Clark Pinnock). I found the book readable and enjoyable - even as I disagreed with some of the conclusions to which the author arrives. Regardless of whether the reader comes as a Calvinist, an Arminian, or if the reader is searching, the book is a good introduction to the Reformed faith. I will look forward to reading the other Zondervan title being published in parallel with Horton's text, "Against Calvinism" by Roger Olson. This review is based on an electronic copy of the book provided by the publisher for the purpose of creating an unbiased review.

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