

Proof-Texts for Reformed Theology: Part 1

Dr. John Niemelä: Water of Life

Reformed theology, often called Calvinism, is really post-Calvinism. Calvin (1509-1564) did not systematize his teachings on how people receive everlasting life. Thus, his teachings had inconsistencies.

Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) thought that what Calvin taught was heavy-handed, so he systematized things in a way that leaned against the general tenor of Calvin's thought, although (since Calvin had some inconsistencies) the relationship between Calvin and Arminius is not exactly point/counter-point.

Human Free Will:	The fall hindered, but did not remove, man's ability to believe.
Conditional Election:	God chose people for salvation that He foreknew would believe.
Unlimited Atonement:	Jesus died for both elect and non-elect.
Resistible Grace:	Anyone can resist God's grace in trying to save them.
Man Can Fall from Grace:	True believers who do not persevere until death go to hell.

The Synod of Dort (named for the city of Dordrecht in Holland) in 1619 formalized five points of Calvinism in response to the five points of Arminianism (seeking to be more consistent than Calvin). Subsequently, someone reformulated the wording to yield the acronym TULIP.

T	Total Depravity:	Man is so dead that he is incapable of believing.
U	Unconditional Election:	God arbitrarily chose (elected) who He would save. (Consistent Reformed Theologians also say He chose who could not be saved).
L	Limited Atonement:	Jesus only died for the elect.
I	Irresistible Grace:	The elect cannot resist being saved.
P	Perseverance of the Saints:	The elect will persevere unto death in faith and good works. If one does not persevere, he/she must not be elect and will go to hell.

Though these two systems seem radically different, they are quite similar **in their effect**. Arminians, Reformed, and Catholics would all agree to the following syllogism:

Major Premise: Only those who persevere until death will be with God forever in heaven,
Minor Premise: No one can know if he/she will persevere until death in faith & good works,
Conclusion: No one can know if he/she will be with God forever in heaven.

Which denominations advocate Reformed theology? Presbyterians, Reformed, Particular Baptists, etc. Most conservative theological seminaries have a preponderance of Reformed professors. Some popular Reformed preachers: MacArthur, Sproule, Piper, Kennedy, D.A. Carson, Kay Arthur, etc. Most conservative Christian books (pop or scholarly) and preachers push Reformed ideas, so John Doe Christian generally has a heavy dose of Reformed thinking about lots of topics and passages.

Both Reformed and Arminian theologians suffer from reductionism: the assumption that only two models are possible:

Both Arminians and Reformed interpret, "I am not Arminian," as "I am Reformed."

Both Arminians and Reformed interpret, "I am not Reformed," as "I am Arminian."

Neither thinks that it is possible to be neither Arminian nor Reformed.

Reformed people say, "Unless you are 100% Reformed, you are Arminian."

My response: Both Arminians and Reformed are asking the wrong questions, because neither Calvin, nor Arminius, nor the Synod of Dort, nor Arminians, nor Reformed have asked the right questions. How might we illustrate? Let's assume that no English dictionaries existed and that a foreigner wanted to know which two (of the following) use trunk in the same way. He knows about elephant trunks.

He accumulated several sentences that use the word.

The elephant sprayed water from its trunk.

The groceries are in the trunk.

The man removed a wedge from the trunk, before the final cut felled the tree.

I hoisted the trunk from baggage claim and tossed it into the car.

The locomotive followed the trunk line from the wye.

Volkswagen 'beetles' have their trunk in front.

He had swimming trunks.

The rash is on the trunk, not the arms.

We can imagine the man becoming quite frustrated. On the other hand, if he were to see pictures of each of the above actions, he would know which two uses have parallel meaning (in bold). Unfortunately, misinterpretation of the proof-texts to prove the five points of Arminianism or the five points of Calvinism. Putting together all these sentences without knowing any definition of trunk other than the proboscis of an elephant.

The groceries that are in the elephant's trunk are all wet, but the elephant sprayed out the water (leaving the groceries damp) before a tree feller surgically removed a steel wood-splitting wedge from inside the elephant's trunk. Furthermore, the elephant was so small that it passed through baggage claim at the airport and a man hurled the elephant inside a Volkswagen that had a rash. In addition, a locomotive followed the Volkswagen with an elephant whose trunk went swimming.

Unfortunately, both Calvinists and Arminians commit a similar error. Both have systems that are based on trying to make sense of doctrines, by putting together unrelated passages that they fundamentally misunderstand.

How Reformed people understand *dead* in Ephesians 2:

They say: If an unbeliever could believe, he would need to be alive. He might be really sick, but he would need to be alive. When is the last time you ever saw a dead man do anything?

They define the word “dead” as “total inability.” See their first point: total depravity (TULIP)

I disagree with their definition of dead. I maintain that Paul did not mean total inability by *dead*.

We have a long sentence in Greek: 2:1-7. Note that our English divides it into 2-3 sentences.

The main verbs are in 2:5-6: jointly made-alive, jointly raised, jointly seated.

Note the parenthetic: —by grace you are saved— or (by grace you are saved) in verse 5

Explaining why it is in parentheses or em-dashes (—)

How would God save a dead man? (you were dead, v 1; and we were dead, v 5)

Now, note that 2:8 repeats “by grace you are saved,” but it adds something: “through faith”

Which of the following (1 or 2, etc.) takes place first in each sentence?

- (1) We came here (2) through driving.
- (3) The lights came on (4) through flicking the light switch.
- (4) Through hard work (5) the man put money into the bank.
- (6) Through following the doctor’s orders (7) the man recovered.
- (8) We are saved [= made alive] (9) through faith.

Do people (according to Paul) believe before or after they were made alive?

What does “dead” really mean in Ephesians? Reformed people use Ephesians 2 to try to prove their system, but they do not understand Ephesians 2.

1 Peter 1:1-2 as translated in English (Basically all the European translations have had a heavy dose of Reformed thinking, because many of the translators were (are) Reformed.

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, **To the pilgrims** of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² **elect** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (NKJ)

1 Peter 1:1 Πέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ **ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις** διασπορᾶς Πόντου Γαλατίας Καππαδοκίας Ἀσίας καὶ Βιθυνίας ² κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθείη

Petros apostolos Iēsou Christou eklektois parepidēmois diasporas
Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ **to elect pilgrims** of the diaspora

Pontou Galatias Kappadokias Asias kai Bithynias ² *kata*
of Pontus Galatia Cappadocia Asia and Bithynia ² according to

prognōsin Theou Patros en hagiasmō Pneumatōs eis
foreknowledge of God the Father in sanctification of the Spirit unto

hypakoēn kai rhantismōn haimatos Iēsou Christou
obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

charis humin kai eirēnē plēthuntheiē.
grace to you and peace be multiplied.

How Reformed misinterpret this

Look at 1 Peter 2:11-12

How should 1 Peter 1:1-2 be interpreted?