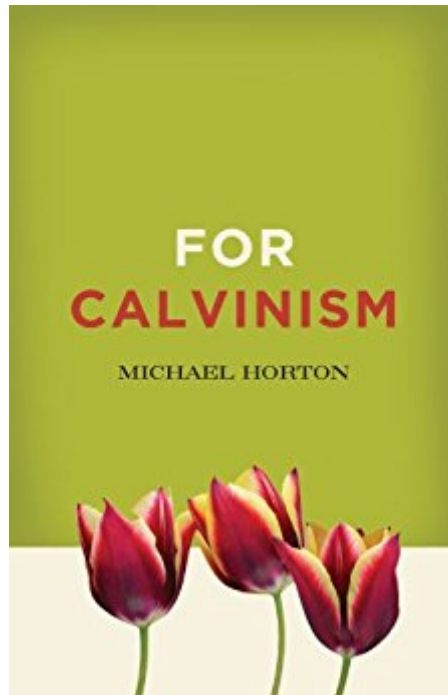




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For Calvinism



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

Having previously reviewed Roger Olsen's *Against Calvinism*, I turn to Michael Horton's *For Calvinism*, the partner book in the series. Horton provides a cogent and respectful rebuttal to *Against Calvinism*. In fact, this is probably one of the biggest points in favor of both books, as each author writes the Forward for the other book and remains respectful of opposing positions throughout. *For Calvinism* attempts to provide a snapshot of the TULIP system (the 5 main points of the view of Calvinism that Horton holds). In this, the book is largely successful and does so in a logical manner. While I am not completely convinced by arguments for the TULIP system, I can still say that the book accomplishes its purpose in a well written manner. The length of each book should let the reader know that neither is an exhaustive treatment of Calvinism's strengths or weaknesses but is intended to bring out the primary concerns and also serve as a short commentary on church history and clear up misconceptions about the issue. Horton does a very good job of defining Calvinism and its place in church history as well as refuting common myths about Calvinists and evangelism. The one fault I found was that Horton spends a fair bit of time discussing the social implications of Calvinism and defending Calvinism's place in ministry. Given the book's short length, I think Horton could have replaced 15-20 pages spent on social issues within the church with more arguments about the TULIP system. Horton also does not interact with some of the points brought up in Olsen's book but both likely wrote their books separately. In the end, Horton does a fair job of discussing the emergence of Calvinism in the church, presenting evidence for the TULIP system in a coherent manner, and refutes some of the negative stereotypes about Calvinists circulating in churches and on the internet. Horton spends more time and marshals more scripture in defense of the TULIP system than Olsen does in his companion book, which many will undoubtedly find to be the strength of the book (recommend that the reader have a Bible with them while reading as Horton typically cites several verses when defending topics). Horton does not appear quite as adept when dealing with philosophical objections or issues and I imagine philosophy students will notice a few errors in some of the examples that Horton uses throughout the book. This is unfortunate as many see the issue as one of theology vs philosophy which is not the case and requires an understanding of both to deal with the issues carefully. This negative is mitigated by having Olsen's book which is much better with philosophical understandings but may leave some feeling that it did not deal with enough scripture and theology. The book is best for those who want to start from the beginning on the issue of Calvinism and see introductory arguments for Calvinism (*For Calvinism* and *Against Calvinism* are meant to be companion books and should both be bought and read back to back). People who already have their minds made up will likely not be swayed by this book (and if already convinced, the book will likely serve more as

happy comfort food than furthering the reader's theology). However, as someone who does not agree with Horton on several points, I think some reviewers have missed the point of each book of the series. The book will contain "typical" arguments for Calvinism as that is the intent of the book (the books are not meant to be like James white's and Norman Geisler's books "Chosen but Free"/"The Potter's Freedom" which are larger exegetical treatments and some would say questionable in their tone and civility towards each other). I recommend For Calvinism for those interested in learning about Reformed theology, why these issues have been divisive within the church, and what the author thinks the implications are for doctrine. Between this and Olsen's book, the reader in a short time will have a decent overview of the social and theological issues at hand and provide an excellent starting point for determining their theological views on these important matters.

For Calvinism, by Michael Horton, was released as a part of a simultaneous release with Against Calvinism by Roger Olson. I read and reviewed Olson's book at the end of last year/beginning of this year....literally, I believe that is what I did on New Year's Eve. :-D I was not in as great a hurry to read For Calvinism as I was Against Calvinism by Olson. I had already read much by Horton and was already pretty firmly "for Calvinism", so I figured Olson's book was a good place to start. After reading Olson's critique of reformed theology, specifically the doctrines of grace, I was unimpressed with his argument against "Calvinism". However, as we are beginning a study of Ephesians at church, and "Calvinism" is flooding convention thought in the SBC, yet again, I thought this would be a good time to read Horton's take on the validity of "Calvinism". There is much to take away from this book. "Calvinism", or Reformed Theology(preferable), is not a TULIP. This is significant for a couple of reasons. First off, the TULIP acronym, was invented after 1900 as a way of summarizing the Synod of Dordt, the five points themselves a reaction to the Remonstrants' five points. Greater still, is the fact that the terminology attached to TULIP leads to great confusion. The TULIP does not define the points to which they are assigned sufficiently or clearly. This is why, in his book, Horton addresses some of the points with different terminology(ie, Total Depravity=Radical Depravity; Irresistible Grace=Effectual Grace; Limited Atonement=Definite Atonement). While RUDEP may not be as easy to remember as TULIP, the exchange of a memorable acronym for an accurate one is probably worth the effort. The greater reason not to equate TULIP with Reformed Theology as a whole is because the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith cannot be reduced to five points of soteriology. Horton devotes an entire chapter, and sections within chapters, expounding on the riches of Reformed Theology and practice. He makes an argument for the Regulative principle,

Covenant theology, how Reformed theology views the atonement and the extent of the redeeming work of Christ beyond just sinners but unto all of creation, how Reformed Theology interacts with society and creation, etc... Reformed faith and practice cannot be reduced to the TULIP(or even RUDEP) and, beyond that, the TULIP is not even the central dogma of Reformed theology. Horton devotes a chapter to Calvinism and missions/evangelism. It is a great chapter, and an important one, because so often(as in Geisler's Chosen But Free) the accusation is made that Calvinist theology impedes evangelism and missions. That believing in the sovereign grace of God erases any desire to share the Gospel with a neighbor or labor for the Gospel to reach the ends of the world. Horton begins the chapter with page after page of historical examples to the contrary. From the time of Calvin (who trained hundreds of missionaries) on, Horton lays out historical example after example of Christians who held dearly to the doctrines of grace and also labored faithfully, sacrificially, and often unto death to see that the Gospel was proclaimed to those who had never heard the name of Jesus. Horton shows that statistically, those who hold to Reformed theology, send as much or more money to support foreign missions, and as many or more missionaries onto the mission field. In fact, citing a PCA News report, the Presbyterian Church in America(Reformed, doctrines of grace, allegedly no desire or need to do missions) supports three times as many foreign missionaries per capita as the Southern Baptist Convention supports foreign and domestic missionaries per capita. After showing that history and statistics do not match the caricature of the mission/evangelism-hating Calvinist, Horton spends time discussing the theological underpinnings of Reformed missions. In the final chapter, Horton unpacks some of the strengths of Reformed theology, and some of the dangers we can stumble upon if we embrace the doctrines of grace. This chapter is a gentle rebuke for some who are in the "cage stage" and may be using this book as ammunition to attack brothers and sisters who may not agree with their flower of choice. It is also a good reminder for those of us who have grown out of the "cage stage", lest we necessitate a re-caging. I am a Horton fan, from the White Horse Inn to Modern Reformation, to his systematic theology and his preaching, and I am a fan of this book. I will admit, as with everything I have read by Horton, at times I get left behind in the text, a little lost. Olson's writing style is much more suited to introductions to issues. Against Calvinism, while not watered down, was a much easier read for me than For Calvinism was at a few parts. Being said, I would commend this book to all and encourage any who may get bogged down at parts to keep working through it. The payoff from this book is worth the effort. I would agree with Roger Olson, mostly, on his recommendation of the book from the foreword. Anyone interested in reading the best case possible for Calvinism must read this book. It is informative, engaging, clear, and self-critical. It helpfully contributes to the ongoing

discussions and debates about God's sovereignty among evangelicals...After reading this book I can recommend it wholeheartedly with the reservation that I strongly disagree with its central claims...It is possible to be committed and fair, critical and generous. For Calvinism proves it and my hearty endorsement reveals it.--Roger Olson

Horton gives a gracious presentation of Calvinism. This is the most palatable presentation I have read so far. As an Arminian I am glad I read this as it challenged some of my assumptions about Calvinism. Both books in this series should be read to get a full picture of the pros and cons. In the final analysis I am more convinced by Roger Olson.

Probably not the first book to read on your Christian journey but certainly one you should read if you've been a believer for a while and want a little deeper understanding of your faith. I highly recommend reading this along with its reciprocal book *Against Calvinism*. The two together do a great job of giving you a solid working knowledge of the argument between Calvinism and Arminianism. I don't believe you have to understand the subtleties of these two theologies to be saved but eventually you'll start to ask or attempt to answer questions about why some people just won't be reached by any attempt at evangelism or what to believe about people that never get to hear about Jesus. These questions are not new and many people that were incredibly wise and well-read have attempted to answer these questions as well as they can be answered. One key stop on this journey to finding these answers is going to be addressing these two opposing perspectives here.

I'm not a Calvinist, but I appreciate the clarity of his presentation and his graciousness towards those fellow believers who do not quite see it his way. While his argument has not swayed me personally, I must admit that after reading the book I could do worse than becoming a Calvinist.

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