

Hyper-Calvinism?

By Elder David Pyles

One loathsome label that Primitive Baptists like myself must commonly endure is “hyper-Calvinism.” While Christians should never be surprised when pejoratives are cast against them, very few Primitive Baptists would have expected their beliefs to be stigmatized as an extreme or “hyper” rendition of John Calvin’s doctrine. Instead, most of them would have expected the opposite, or to be accused of “hypo-Calvinism.”

Primitive Baptists happily and resolutely affirm all five of the major doctrines of Calvinism (commonly represented with the acronym TULIP), and this actually explains why some people call them “hyper-Calvinists.” If this seems strange, then indeed it should. Even John Calvin himself would be a “hyper-Calvinist” under this dubious definition. So it appears that “hyper-Calvinism” is sometimes an insult that non-Calvinists and pseudo-Calvinists cast against those who are simply Calvinists. The prefix “hyper” is added to stigmatize them as extreme. However, sometimes even Calvinists accuse others of “hyper-Calvinism.” In what follows, I will assume the definition that these usually intend.

The core issue here is whether gospel preachers are agents or instruments in the eternal salvation of those who hear them. Arminians and Calvinists, notwithstanding all their differences, are agreed that preaching and belief of preaching are means to being born again, to being rendered righteous before God, and therefore to being eternally saved. The difference is that Calvinists think the process operates under the forces of election and predestination, and therefore under Divine decision and direction, whereas Arminians believe the outcome finally swings on human decision. Now the much-maligned hyper-Calvinists agree with Calvinists that salvation is a sovereign act of God, but they disagree with both Arminians and Calvinists about the instrumentality of preachers. They say that preaching and belief of preaching are the means of *certifying* that a man is eternally saved, and serve to bring him into the temporal benefits of this fact, and serve to glorify God for what He has done, but that one man is not in any sense the cause or means to the eternal salvation of another. Rather, they say eternal salvation is the sovereign, irresistible, irreversible and *direct* act of

God alone. Make no mistake, when all distractions are removed, and all spurious accusations are dismissed, and all smoke is cleared, this is the core issue that unites the otherwise irreconcilable Arminians and Calvinists against what they call “hyper-Calvinists.”

Now those who are thus accused can with good propriety question the sincerity and credibility of their accusers. The accusers claim that their assets and actions are instrumental in delivering their fellow men from hell to heaven, yet the same accusers oftentimes possess many worldly goods and spend much time in leisure. They can live in domiciles far more luxuriant than those of the poor souls they purport to eternally save. Some have laid up for themselves large retirement accounts and other investments. Indeed, even their places of worship are oftentimes extravagant, and seem to compete with each other to catch the impressionable eye. Add to this that some of them take lengthy vacations, spend much time watching television and commonly attend sporting events. One must wonder how many poor souls will spend eternity in a miserable, burning hell on account of such indulgences? Are we not compelled to conclude that such accusers of hyper-Calvinists do not truly believe what they claim or else they have the hearts of crocodiles?

It is inconceivable that any form of hypocrisy could surpass what I have just described; however, I will add yet another: This is in the common accusation against alleged hyper-Calvinists that their doctrine devalues the gospel by leaving it with no meaningful purpose. In reply to this, note that these accusers claim to believe in an eternal hell – and so they should as Jesus plainly taught it – but this accusation of theirs causes one to wonder how seriously they truly take it. Theoretically, at least, hell is more serious than anything else the mind could entertain. Now the typical so-called hyper-Calvinist contends that belief of the gospel is the only infallible proof assuring a man that he will be delivered from this terrible place. Anyone who would charge such claims with deprecating the gospel evidently does not take hell seriously. Eternal hell is not a mere superstition or an idle threat. The accused hyper-Calvinists take hell very seriously, and the confirmation that the believer has been delivered from this awful place is considered to be of infinite value. The gospel “saves” in

its power to put peace and gratitude in troubled minds. It does this by proclaiming a gracious God and Christ who have power to save without the help of man and in spite of the hindrance of man.

The prefix “hyper” is well-calculated to provoke prejudice because “hypo” could actually be judged as truer to the facts. Consider that Calvinists and so-called hyper-Calvinists and even pseudo-Calvinists are alike in that they believe in election and believe that all elect are predestined to heaven. However, all but the alleged hyper-Calvinists assert that human preaching is a means to this end. Now if the elect are predestined to heaven, and if human preaching is the means by which they are to get there, this would imply that God has predestined all elect to hear preachers. Most Calvinists concede that this conclusion is a consequence of their system because they commonly say that if God has predestined the end then He must have also predestined all means to that end. The so-called hyper-Calvinists are not bound to this conclusion and rarely do they draw it. They believe that human negligence and disobedience can deter the progress and effectiveness of the gospel, and consider it irresponsible to blame our failures in this respect on lack of predestination to prompt us. It is therefore very strange that their emphasis upon human responsibility in this important matter would be characterized as an extreme or “hyper” form of Calvinism. The prefix “hypo” would seem a better fit.

“Hyper-Calvinism” is a loathsome label that no Christian should want to wear, but the simple facts are that the accused hyper-Calvinists: 1) give more glory to God and Christ for the work of eternal salvation than is done in any other Christian system, 2) are not guilty of the hypocrisy commonly seen in those who represent themselves as being the instruments of eternally saving others, and 3) take responsibility for the commandment to preach the gospel and do not dismiss their failures at such to lack of divine predestination. If this is what is meant by “hyper-Calvinist,” then call me whatever you will, I resolutely declare that I intend never to be anything else! *“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach,”* (Heb 13:13).