

**1. What was the purpose of the John 3:16 conference, and how is the book *Whosoever Will* different? Share with us your vision and reasons for co-sponsoring that conference and now publishing this book.**

In the last fifteen years, there has been a growing resurgence of Calvinism in the evangelical world as well as in the Southern Baptist Convention. The purpose of the John 3:16 conference was to provide a biblical and theological evaluation and critique of Calvinism by non-Calvinists. It is important to notice that this conference did not feature a single Arminian as a speaker. Many wrongly assume that there are only two theological positions on these issues: Calvinism and Arminianism. That is far too simplistic. In fact, most Baptists are neither Calvinists nor Arminians, but would better be called “Calminians,” in that they affirm some aspects of each theological tradition.

From the beginning, our purpose was never to engage in “Calvinist bashing.” Had we been interested in that, we could have secured more strident writers to contribute to the volume. Disagreement on this issue is obvious. We have attempted to disagree with our Calvinist brothers and sisters in a Christ like spirit, while seeking at the same time to offer a scholarly, biblically based, and theologically sound critique. We do not by any means oppose all views of Calvinism; we hold much more in common than the points about which we disagree. Since Calvinists themselves disagree on some key issues, we agree with some Calvinists on particular issues but disagree with other Calvinists. At several points, we join with moderate Calvinists in opposing more extreme forms of Calvinism. One of our contributors is himself a moderate-Calvinist.

We are publishing this book for several reasons. First, this issue is a hot topic of conversation in the broader evangelical world as well as in our Southern Baptist Convention. So much has been published recently on the Calvinist side of the issue. However, LifeWay Research statistics indicate that five-point Calvinism is a small minority among Southern Baptists as a whole. Many pastors and laymen have requested someone to present the majority perspective on this subject. Second, while there are a few books that critique Calvinism at a popular level, there are very few that do so from a scholarly perspective. We believe this book is a modest effort at beginning to fill that lacuna.

Third, this book provides a fuller presentation than was possible at the John 3:16 conference due to time constraints. Some of the presenters had additional material they were unable to present. Also, the book format allows for more thorough documentation of the quotations and references cited at the John 3:16 conference. Fourth, in addition to the major conference presentations, the book contains a number of new articles on key subjects related to the debate. Fifth, we think that many moderate Calvinists will resonate with much of this book and appreciate some of the evidence that demonstrates that they may be closer to the perspective of Calvin himself than others who call themselves Calvinists on issues such as, for example, the extent of the atonement. Our concerns are addressed primarily to more extreme forms of Calvinism; some Calvinists may share these concerns. Although they may disagree with some points made in the book, some moderate Calvinists have already told us that they appreciate the fact that we have provided evidence against some aspects of more extreme Calvinism. Indeed, one of our contributors is himself a four-point Calvinist.

## 2. Give us a summary of your book.

After a foreword by Johnny Hunt (Pastor, First Baptist Church of Woodstock, GA, host pastor for the John 3:16 Conference and current SBC President) and a preface by James Leo Garrett (Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), the first section of the book features edited versions of the presentations made at the John 3:16 Conference. This section is introduced by a sermon by Jerry Vines (Director of Jerry Vines Ministries, former SBC President, and former Pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL) on the soteriological implications of the John 3:16 text that was the namesake of the conference.

Five scholars then address each of the five points of classical Calvinist soteriology. Paige Patterson (President, Professor of Theology, and L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, former SBC President) provides a biblical and theological critique of “Total Depravity.” In “Congruent Election: Understanding Salvation from an ‘Eternal Now’ Perspective,” Richard Land (President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) critiques “Unconditional Election” and proposes an alternative of “Congruent Election.” David L. Allen (Dean of the School of Theology, Professor of Preaching, George W. Truett Chair of Ministry, and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a carefully documented examination of the Calvinists who reject the doctrine of “Limited Atonement,” and challenges the scriptural basis for the doctrine. Steve Lemke (Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, and Editor of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) questions the biblical foundation and theological adequacy of the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace. Ken Keathley (Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) affirms the security of the believer while providing a critique of the view of perseverance held by some Calvinists.

In section two, five new chapters are added on theological and ministry issues arising from Calvinism that were not addressed in the conference. In “Was Calvin a Calvinist?: Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement,” Kevin Kennedy (Assistant Professor of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) questions whether Calvin himself held some of the views advocated by some modern Calvinists. Malcolm Yarnell (Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Theological Research, Director of the Oxford Study Program, and Editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a richly documented assessment of a number of ecclesiological issues for Baptists in regard to Calvinism. R. Alan Streett (Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry, W. A. Criswell Chair of Expository Preaching, and Editor of the *Criswell Theological Review* at Criswell College) addresses the issue of the appropriateness of offering public invitations or altar calls in churches, which are rejected by some Calvinists. Jeremy Evans (Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) raises questions about whether the kind of determinism held by some Calvinists is consistent with Scripture, logic, and human experience. Finally, in “Evil and God’s Sovereignty,” Bruce Little (Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) challenges the adequacy of the answer to the problem of evil proposed by some varieties of Calvinism, especially in regard to the glory and holiness of God.

### **3. Christians generally as well as Southern Baptists have long debated the issues raised in this book, and a good number of books have already been published. What is new about your book?**

First of all, most recent books published on this topic have been from the Calvinist perspective, not the traditional Baptist perspective. Furthermore, of the few critiques of Calvinism that have been published which specifically address the five points of the TULIP, most have not been written from a Southern Baptist perspective. Some of these are written as a survey for laymen, rather than providing a more thorough and scholarly biblical and theological critique. This book gathers together in one place a serious, scholarly presentation of the non-Calvinist position that is the majority view within Southern Baptist life.

Second, there is some new material in our book that should be of interest to all. In Richard Land's chapter on election from the perspective of what he calls "congruent election," not only will many find new insights on election, but on the relation of God and time as well. David Allen's chapter on limited atonement and Kevin Kennedy's chapter on Calvin's view of the extent of the atonement will be eye-opening for many in that they build a convincing case that many Calvinists from the very beginning, including Calvin himself, never affirmed limited atonement. Even those who attended the John 3:16 Conference will enjoy the expanded articles and additional articles that go beyond the presentations at the conference.

### **4. Why is this book important to students preparing for ministry in seminary or Bible college?**

Calvinism is a major theological issue and students need to be thoroughly aware of both the Calvinist and the non-Calvinist positions. This issue transcends contemporary discussions, and has, in fact, been ongoing for half a millennium. In the classroom and out, it is one of the most frequently discussed and debated issues of our day. As future pastors, church staff members, and church leaders, students will be asked countless times for an explanation of the differences between Calvinists and non-Calvinists, and to articulate their own position.

LifeWay Research figures indicate that among recent Southern Baptist college and seminary students approximately 30 percent consider themselves advocates of Calvinism, but approximately 90 percent of the people in Southern Baptist churches are not Calvinistic. This gap between young future pastors who are Calvinists and churches that are not would suggest the need for students of a Calvinistic persuasion to understand and see from a different perspective the beliefs of the majority of Southern Baptists.

Anecdotally, because of some negative experiences with extreme Calvinists, some churches and associations have begun to push back against calling Calvinist pastors and staff members. Sometimes non-Calvinists don't properly understand the nuances of Calvinism and can negatively paint with too broad a brush. Students preparing for ministry need a thorough knowledge of this issue to negotiate through the challenges of ministry in a Southern Baptist context.

### **5. Do you feel it is important for pastors to read this book? If so, why?**

Absolutely! There are several reasons:

1) First, it is important to be knowledgeable of the beliefs of both Calvinists and non-Calvinists. It is our experience that many pastors, by their own admission, don't readily grasp the finer points of these issues. These matters are intricate by nature and need careful presentation and evaluation. This issue is so prominent in our day that no one can escape it. Within the Southern Baptist Convention this subject has risen to a level of significant discussion over the past fifteen years.

2) Second, even if this issue is not an issue in your church at this time, it is just a matter of time before it will become an issue! Returning college students or the next young staff member at the church may be more Calvinistic than the pastor, current staff, or church members. Regardless of the pastor's own theological persuasion on this issue, he must understand carefully both sides for his own sake and for the sake of his people.

3) Third, the pastor is the primary theologian for the people under his care. Pastors will need to be well informed on this subject and be able to lead their churches with wisdom.

**6. Your book is more directly focused on our denomination. What application does the book have for seminaries and Bible colleges outside our denomination?**

Within Bible colleges and seminaries of a more Reformed persuasion, it is sometimes difficult to find a critique of Calvinism that does not come from a purely Arminian perspective. While there are several published Arminian responses on this issue, there are not as many from the non-Calvinist Baptist perspective. Most Baptists believe, as we do, that the Bible teaches a "via media" on this subject. Since Southern Baptists are America's largest protestant denomination, many non-Baptists are interested in this debate so they will understand where most Southern Baptists stand on these issues. This book would serve as a valuable guide for those outside the Southern Baptist Convention.

Within Calvinism itself in the United States, the gatekeepers are virtually all five-pointers. The overwhelming number of books written on this subject today by Calvinists are written by five-point Calvinists. However, historically this has not been the case. The issue of whether limited atonement was a part of the original platform of the first generation of the Reformed is very much in debate and has been since before the Synod of Dort. *Whosoever Will* responds to a strong resurgent five-point Calvinism that is being presented in a more definitive and compelling way than it has been in past centuries.

At the same time, many within Bible colleges and seminaries of an Arminian persuasion also assume that Calvinism and Arminianism are the only options. Again, this is much too simplistic. *Whosoever Will* would serve as a great resource for Arminians as it approaches these issues from a perspective that differs from both Calvinism and Arminianism.