

# “What is Hyper-Calvinism”

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<http://www.enjoyinggodbministries.com/article/what-is-hyper-calvinism>

Unfortunately, the label *Hyper-Calvinist* is used frequently in our day to insult or ridicule anyone who is more Calvinistic than oneself. As far as the Pelagians are concerned, semi-Pelagians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as semi-Pelagians are concerned, Arminians are hyper-Calvinists. As far as Arminians are concerned, four-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. As far as four-point Calvinists are concerned, five-point Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists. Depending on where you find yourself on the theological spectrum, everyone (except the Pelagian) is a hyper-Calvinist. Oh yes, and as far as authentic hyper-Calvinists are concerned, everyone else is just confused!

Perhaps we should use the label with more of a historical awareness of its origin and application. That which historically has separated biblical Calvinism from hyper-Calvinism is the denial by the latter of the external gospel call. Hyper-Calvinism, explains David Engelsma, is the denial

“that God, in the preaching of the gospel, calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher’s addressing the call of the gospel, ‘repent and believe on Christ crucified,’ only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration, and thereby of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation” (David Englesma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980], pp. 10-11).

This view was held by several Congregational and Baptist ministers in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is not to say, however, that no one embraces this view today. Included among these were Joseph Hussey (1660-1726), Lewis Wayman (d. 1764), and John Brine (1703-65). For additional historical information, see Peter Toon, *The*

*Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

It has been customary to place the name of John Gill (b. 1697) at the head of this list as the paradigmatic hyper-Calvinist. This charge may need to be re-examined in the light of certain conclusions reached by Thomas J. Nettles in his book, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), pp. 73-107, 385-91.

According to hyper-Calvinism, *the extent of preaching is determined by the extent of regeneration*. Only those who show evidence of the latter are proper recipients or objects of the former. The principal difficulty with this is that Scripture sanctions no such restriction on the proclamation of Christ and the call to repent and believe. Jesus left his disciples with clear and unequivocal marching orders, to wit, that “repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

When the apostle Paul preached on Mars Hill he made no effort to distinguish between those he thought were or were not elect, and therefore regenerate. Such knowledge belongs to God alone. Rather, Paul’s gospel took the form of an indiscriminate and universal proclamation: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30).

I can only conclude that the external call of the gospel is a vital element in biblical Christianity. To deny it is to deviate from true Calvinism in a most serious way. However, for the sake of clarity (and even charity) perhaps we ought to drop the label *hyper-Calvinist* and simply refer to those who hold that view as *wrong*.

Related to this issue is the question of regeneration and human responsibility. If regeneration is wholly a work of God and therefore the ground and cause of faith, what becomes of a man’s individual responsibility to believe the gospel? John Murray’s comments are most helpful in answering this question:

“The causal priority of regeneration is no excuse for our unbelief and no alibi for sloth or indifference or despair. We may never plead our own depravity as any reason for not believing, nor our inability as any

excuse for unbelief. To argue that we should not repent and believe until we are generated is to introduce confusion in the relation that regeneration sustains to our responsibility. We never know that we are regenerated until we repent and believe. The gospel of grace addresses itself to our responsibility in the demand for repentance and faith. Just as the unknown purposes of God are not the rule of our conduct nor the grounds upon which we act, so the inscrutable operations of God are not the rule or ground of our action, but his revealed will. The rule for us in every case is the revealed will presented to our consciousness. Our belief, our knowledge that we have been regenerated is never the ground upon which we exercise faith in Christ, even though the fact of regeneration is always the source from which issues the exercise of faith and repentance” (“Regeneration,” 188-89).